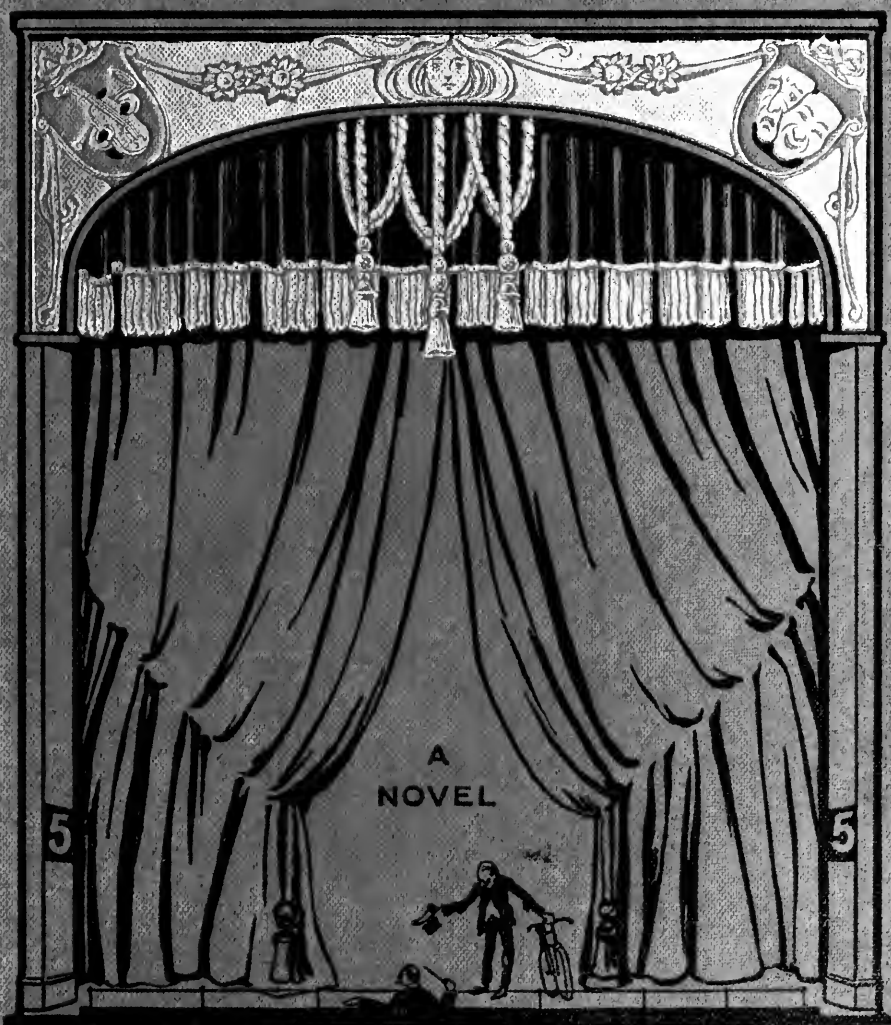


# THE BILL-TOPPERS



ANDRÉ CASTAIGNE

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THE  
**BILL-TOPPERS**

BY  
**ANDRÉ CASTAIGNE**

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED  
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To

MY LITTLE FRIENDS, THE STARS

A. C.

## CONTENTS

|                                 | PAGE |
|---------------------------------|------|
| OVERTURE . . . . .              | I    |
| PART I. CURTAIN RISES . . . . . | 19   |
| „ II. PLAYING 'EM IN . . . . .  | 101  |
| „ III. INTERMEZZO . . . . .     | 193  |
| „ IV. AMONG THE STARS . . . . . | 283  |

NOTE.—The characters in this book exist only  
in the author's imagination and must not be  
associated with any living persons.

# THE BILL-TOPPERS

## OVERTURE

ALL around stretched the great blue sky and the blue sea of the Bay of Bengal.

Mrs. Clifton lay dozing at full length on a pillowed bench and her husband sat near her and followed his Lily, his daughter, with his eyes: his Lily, eight years old, "that high," waving among the passengers the white coral necklace which Pa had bought her on leaving Australia; his Lily, his star, his New Zealander on Wheels! His Lily who had had such successes at Melbourne, at Sydney: bouquets, tons and cartloads of bouquets! And the past would be nothing compared to the future, with the astounding tricks which he was inventing for his Lily. The mere sight of her raised his enthusiasm to boiling-point. And he was going to show them, in Calcutta and elsewhere, if they knew how to make stars in New Zealand, or if they were only fit for raising mutton, damn it! . . .

Clifton was an artist, an "artiste," a born artiste: starting as a mere clerk in an office, he had become an amateur cyclist and then a professional on the track. He married an Englishwoman at Wellington and, at Lily's birth, decided upon a career: the stage, with Lily for a star later on. And he set to work, with vim and vigour, learnt a few tricks on his bike, taught his wife the business in less than

no time ; and Lily's first memories as a four-year-old were :

" I was sitting on Ma's shoulders, Ma on Pa's and Pa on the bike."

And Lily zigzagged through New Zealand, from east to west and north to south, and Australia after, where she received plenty of applause for her tricks, childish in themselves, but well presented. . . . Her triumphant path wound among tinselled bottles containing paper flowers, with a faultless standstill for the climax, one hand on the handle-bar, the other blowing kisses to the audience. This procured Pa an engagement for India. He ordered a beautiful coloured poster, " The Clifton Family, Trick Cyclists," with a portrait of his own strong face and bristling moustache in the corner—" P. T. Clifton, Manager"—one more rung in the ladder of life mounted, thanks to his Lily ! . . .

And Pa smiled to his daughter and, as she ran past him, lifted her on his knee and stroked her fair curls ; and the child cuddled up to her Pa, opened her lips to ask questions, but was silent, with her eyes lost in space, puckering her little forehead, in which were heaped so many mingled memories of the stage and the great world outside : the Boxing Kangaroo ; tall cliffs ; green islands ; the bike ; Batavia among the trees ; Singapore, with its noise and dust. And Lily, wearily, dreamed and murmured things, while the steamer sped on—thud, thud, thud—flat as a stage in its blue " set." . . .

Lily's impressions of India were months of jolting and bumping, stops in the dead of night while the tent was pitched, rains, strong smells, oppressive heats : months and months of it, Ma on Pa, Pa on the wheel and she on top, waving flags. Yellow faces on the benches, red flowers and, somewhere, on a river-bank, two eyes glittering in the dark : a tiger, somebody said ! And, every night, the

artistes, carrying lanterns, walked in file between the circus and the hotel, with the ladies in the centre and Lily clinging to Ma's skirt.

She did more now, in addition to the bike : a song-and-dance turn. In a piping falsetto, she quavered :

"Stars light ! Stars bright !"

She was spoilt by the ladies, the wives of the officers stationed in those out-of-the-way holes. She played with smart children, was taken for drives, had her social successes ! Chocolates, sweets, kisses. And a lady gave her such a pretty dress : his Lily ! ! ! Pa burst with delighted pride to see her treated like that ; and Ma scolded her a bit, for the little flirt that she was, while fondly tying the two satin bows over her ears.

Lily was a regular tomboy, with pranks invented by herself, from ideas which she picked up in travelling : for instance, she would choose her moment and chuck a piece of bacon among the Mohammedans sitting under her window ; and she would revel in her own fright at those furious faces suddenly glaring up at her from below ! And she would stand with drooping head, one finger in her mouth :

"Oh, so sorry !"

What fun ! And as an artiste she was spoilt and petted everywhere. Goa, Bangalore, Tanjore, and then Colombo and a ship with elephants, tigers, camels, children, men, women, wagons, one great mix-up, a circus and menagerie in one, steaming towards South Africa ; and Miss Lily of the Clifton Troupe paraded her well-brushed, neatly-parted curls in the midst of it all, gazed open-mouthed at the blue expanse of water until, her eyes drunk and dazed with light, she went and lay in her cabin. And more and more blue water. And thud, thud, thud. And Cape Town in the mountains. Africa behind it : a country all yellow,

where the trains wound in and out of the rocks ; villages, up, up, up, or else right low down, on the yellow veldt ; and, at night, on the benches, crowds and crowds. Immediately after the show came sleep, troubled by the jolting of the train ; and the circus was always there next day, on the right or on the left, with its Chinamen and its niggers driving stakes or tugging at ropes. A bell for dinner, a whistle for the show ; and, as soon as the show was over, to bed—and off again !

Pa made her practise harder now, wanted to make a great artiste of her. And there was a class, too, kept by a “ marm ” who travelled with the circus and taught spelling and arithmetic and the art of letter-writing, from “ Yours to hand with thanks ” down to “ Believe me to be.” Lily would have been bored to death, but for the accidents of travel : sometimes the engine broke down, bringing the train to a dead stop amid the great African silence, near a field of Indian corn, in which the children played hide-and-seek. Or else there were locusts, locusts “ that thick,” right inside the carriages. Lily would tie them by the leg and :

“ Flip ! Flap ! Lively now ! Jump ! ”

But funniest of all was the caravan—she couldn’t remember where, in Natal or thereabouts—wagons with ten yoke of oxen. They climbed up endless winding roads. The men shot at birds and prospected for diamonds along the wayside ; and at night they took the hay from the mattresses to give to the cattle. Lolling indolence was in the air and plenty in the larder : big fruits, strange game, which they cooked in a makeshift oven consisting of a few stones. Then they rolled themselves up in a blanket, near the elephants tugging at their chains, and slept under the tent in the cool, bright, starry night.

Months and months passed. Lily was becoming very clever : the New Zealander on Wheels ! She was cleverer



than Pa, who no longer performed, nor Ma either. On their return to Australia, Lily appeared by herself, in the music-halls ; and P. T. Clifton, Manager, watched her from the wings, in growing admiration : his Lily was a star now, too good for a circus ! And Australia, pooh ! Sydney, Melbourne, pooh ! What Lily wanted was New York, London, the Hippodromes, the Palaces ! He'd show them a star that was a star ! And Clifton clenched his fists and pretended not to see when Lily made a blunder on the stage : his Lily missing a trick ! Disgracing her Pa like that ! He blushed to the eyes at the thought of it ! And, when she returned to the wings, he twitted her proudly :

“ What next, Lily ! An artiste like you ! ”

And Ma adopted a sarcastic air and congratulated “ mademoiselle ” as she threw the white wrapper over “ mademoiselle's ” shoulders.

Ma detested the stage. She did not think it a nice place for herself ; but for a brat like Lily, lord, it was quite different ! And she ought to have tried to please her Pa and Ma. Mrs. Clifton, though she never voiced the wish, had visions of a trip to London, to stagger some relations, a sister-in-law, she had there and to sneer at the old country, in the usual colonial fashion, and show them what the new countries can do, countries where you make a fortune in less than no time ! And, little by little, smitten with Mr. Clifton's enthusiasm, she came to believe that, in Lily, they really possessed the infant prodigy, the treasure-child upon whom their fortune depended. And Ma, too, was vexed when Lily missed a trick on the stage.

Lily laughed at their anger. Ma had never raised a hand to her ; and, as for Pa, when he scolded, Lily had such a way of looking at him, with lowered head—“ Oh, so sorry ! ”—that Pa simmered down again at once. Lily, a regular “ tenter,” shot up freely, grew up a real tomboy, went a bit too far, in fact, Ma said : at Honolulu, for

instance, on the way to 'Frisco and New York, where Pa had resolved to go, at all costs, come what might—it was one step nearer London!—at Honolulu—ten days there and such a success!—the child played truant in the gardens teeming with birds and fruit, climbed apple-trees, was caught one day and scampered off at full speed, pursued by Ma, who threatened to give her a sound smacking this time, the little thief! But Pa thought it ridiculous, for the sake of an apple.

“And suppose Lily had broken her leg with her nonsense?” asked Ma. “Where would your New York be?” . . .

Pa felt himself a conquering hero when they steamed through the Golden Gate: the States at last! And no sooner was his foot on the wharf at 'Frisco than off to the agents at once, with his photos, his contracts, his posters! But it was her birth-certificate they asked to see. And no babes and sucklings allowed on the stage here. It was all right down yonder, but the law prevented it here.

“Damn your laws!” snapped Pa furiously. “Do you think we make stars to hide them under bushels?”

And whoosh! Off for Mexico, where children are allowed to perform. . . .

Now, in Arizona, near Phoenix, where the train stopped for some hours, owing to an accident to the Rio Gila bridge, Pa happened upon a merrymaking which reminded him of West Australia. Cow-boys, galloping horses, a pretence at fighting, lassoing, revolvers, a track for amateur cyclists and—yes, there, in a desert—on a platform, right in the middle, what should Pa see but an amazing artiste, riding on the back-wheel, with the other in the air! And such twirls! And the boys were shouting:

“Hullo, Trampy! Have a drink, Trampy!”

And Trampy accepted:

“With you, my lord! As soon as I've done, my lord!”

And off he wheeled, head on the saddle, feet in the air, whistling *Yankee Doodle* !

It was impossible ! Pa rubbed his eyes : what ! Was this what they did in the States in the desert ? And he who had hoped, with Lily . . . why, damn it, Lily knew nothing ! He himself, her manager, knew less than nothing ! He, who thought he had formed a star ! Pa was red with shame. And, suddenly, he had a happy thought : he, too, offered Trampy a drink, something to propose to him. . . .

“ All right.”

They shook hands, went to the bar, lit a cigar, like men, by Jove ! Clifton loved to talk business, to pull out notebooks, quick, and jot things down with a knowing air. Trampy, a mere boy, easy-going, genial, without a red cent for the time being, didn't care a hang about business and was soon telling Clifton the story of his life : drummer, reporter, racer ; his descent—“ Two whiskies, boy ! ”—what was he saying ? Oh, yes, his descent of a staircase on the bike, yes, siree, with a red-hot stove under his arm—a stove painted to look red-hot—pursued by a policeman, leaping over obstacles on the bike ; great success at Duluth and Denver as a tramp cyclist : hence his name of Trampy Wheel-Pad. But the girls, by Jove ! Well, he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day. Still, a rolling stone doesn't climb hills. Here he was, stranded. Go to Mexico ? So much a week ? Such and such a turn ? Teach the child ? Cert !

Lily never alluded to Mexico afterwards without shaking with anger. My, to listen to her, how badly they treated her in Mexico ! Worse than a Dago ! To tell the truth, it was hot ; and Lily, already tired by those long journeys in varying climates, would have preferred to do nothing and to go on leading the careless life of a playful filly. But no, poor Lily was caught by the hind-leg in Mexico !

Ambition had seized upon Pa, body and soul, and life became a more serious matter for the child.

"Look here!" said Pa, pointing to Trampy. "What he, a man, does, you can do! I'll see to that!"

Pa arranged for a place in which to practise at their ease. In the evening, on the stage, he watched and studied Trampy's tricks; and, in the morning, quick, out of bed, look alive, the bike! Pa no longer had his open-mouthed admiration for Lily, as in South Africa and Asia: his Lily knew nothing at all! But in three months, six months, if necessary, if it cost him every penny he possessed! . . . And it was:

"Come along, Lily, to work! Show what you can do!"

Trampy, in this country of *mañolas*—"Grand, by Jove!"—came round about eleven; and Pa, all out of breath, passed Lily on to him:

"You have a go at her, Trampy! I give up; she won't do what I say!"

And Trampy put down his cigar, took off his collar and cuffs and it was, "Come along, Lily!" till lunch-time. The child, her eyes blinking with fatigue, fell fast asleep before the end of the meal. . . .

Pa was delighted.

And he confided her to Trampy more and more, with orders not to spare smackings in case of need:

"Eh, Lily? Eh?"

As for him, he had letters to write, great schemes in his head, business, damn it! For instance, he must try to get permission for Lily to appear in the States. . . .

"Time for a cigar, I guess," said Trampy, as soon as Clifton was gone.

Work stopped abruptly; a tumbler's carpet rolled up in a corner formed an inviting lounge; and Lily, panting from her practice, would stretch herself beside him and enjoy a few happy moments, the only really happy moments

of the day ; for there were matinées in the afternoon and the evening performance at night, till she was ready to drop with weariness. Trampy treated Lily nicely, like a grown-up person, called her by the name of a fruit, or a flower, or a bird, jollied her, called her " little wifey " : it was all one to her. He made her laugh with his funny stories, his fairy-tales about himself, his terrible struggle with a snake in the streets of 'Frisco, after a champagne supper : girls, by Jove ! He toned down his anecdotes and dished them up for Lily's entertainment ; told her absurd yarns enlivened with mimicry, in which he excelled, like the real mummer that he was ; and Lily shrieked with laughter, head thrown back, full-throated.

And there was a spice of fear in it all : was that Pa coming back ? No, a carpenter or scene-shifter, perhaps, or else the Martellos, brother and sister, going to practise their slack-wire, their head-and-hand-balancing. The father, old Martello, a famous name, lived in London, it appeared, alone with his " Bambinis," mere babes still. His other children and his apprentices had all run away, to escape his horsewhip, and the brother in Mexico was continuing the tradition. His brutality, in fact, got him into trouble wherever he went, so much so that the big music-halls were closed to him, for fear of scandal. And he terrorized his sister, Ave Maria, a girl of sixteen, a dark girl with great dark eyes. Ave Maria never spoke to anybody ; when she passed through the room where Lily was having fun with Trampy, she fixed a fiery glance upon them, even ventured on a smile, for Trampy in particular, whose lively stories reached her through the partition behind which she dressed. Oh, how she envied Lily ! But she passed very quickly, because of her brother.

And this time it *was* Pa ! Lily jumped on to the saddle like a mad thing, played her part to perfection, puffed and panted, as if the last drop of strength were oozing out of

her, and Trampy joined in the little comedy of fibbing and dissembling :

“ There, like that, Lily, or I'll smack you ! ”

“ That's right,” said Pa. “ Make her work ! ”

And, just to show Lily what work meant and that her Pa was not so unkind after all—“ It's for your good, Lily ! You'll thank me one of these days ! ”—he took her to the stage, where Ave Maria was practising. Now, of course, in the circuses, Lily, occasionally, had seen children knocked and cut about with blows and trained to say, “ It was the cat,” when any one asked them about the marks. They were ordinary children ; she had rolled about in the sawdust with them, played hide-and-seek with them in the fields of Indian corn ; they were children who romped and ran about and laughed. Ave Maria was different. The brother, a savage, scowling brute, was always after her, harrying her with muttered threats. She was in a constant, visible tremble of fear ; and, if she slipped on her wire, the fellow snarled as if to bite her in the foot, pinched her black and blue, restored her balance with a blow of the belt, shook the supports to make her fall, just to see ! . . .

“ Oh, Pa, he'll kill her ! ” whispered Lily.

“ It's none of our damned business,” replied Pa, curtly.

Martello's evil example ended by catching hold of Pa : that's how artistes were formed, damn it ! And, at the thought of the time wasted, he clenched his fists. . . . To have a Lily of his own, all his own, and to have made nothing out of her yet ! Still, it was not Lily's fault. Yes, though, it was her fault, she was so stubborn, so wilful ! When he told her to do a thing, why not do it, instead of bleating :

“ Pa, I can't ! Pa, I can't ! ”

A brief struggle followed between Lily and her Pa. Lily was not built for passive obedience, wasn't used to

it. She no longer knew her Pa. When he came at her with his hand lifted to strike, when he spoke of unbuckling his belt—"Damn those blasted brats!"—Lily eyed him with a look of anguish:

"But Pa, I'm not Ave Maria!" she said. "I'm not a Dago!"

And she raised her little rebellious face to him. He humbled her with a smack on the cheek:

"On the saddle! Up! Quick!"

The child, mastered by her Pa's strength and energy, ceased to be the spoilt child, became an artiste, head on the saddle, back-wheel: just like Trampy! Pooh, Trampy, after a few months of this life, was nowhere, Clifton admired him less and less, Lily was doing all that he did, more than he did; and without a fault, without a hitch, unerring and exact! Pa swelled with pride at the mere sight of his Lily, his four-stone-ten of flesh and bones fitted to the machine, his Lily, the Lily of his dreams!

"I'll dress you in velvet and satin!" he said, in his enthusiasm. "I'll cover you with diamonds!"

Pa, thanks to his indomitable energy, had made something of his Lily, a real artiste, at last! And business was moving, too! He had a contract in his pocket for the States, where Lily would no doubt get permission to do her "childish tricks," seeing that she was travelling with her Pa and Ma. As for Trampy, Pa had no use for Trampy, made no bones about sacking him on some pretext or other:

"Run away and play with your girls, by Jove! Or whatever you like! . . . Good-bye! Ta-ta!"

And off for Denver, whence they were to continue the journey up to Chicago.

It was the dive for good and all into the stuffy atmosphere behind the scenes, which Lily was never again to

leave, brick walls, where she waited her turn on the elaborate programme of the "continuous performances," amid the thunder of the orchestra and the lightning of the reflectors. No time to go out, meals consumed in your dressing-room on the top of the basket trunk. In the mornings, new tricks to practise on the stage, in the midst of a herd of girls whom gentlemen in their shirt-sleeves were training to sing in chorus and to keep step to the strum of the piano. And ever and ever so many new faces, a tumult of tongues which Lily heard on the stage, in the dressing-room and even in her room at the hotel, through the thin partition walls: a lingo made up of coarse remarks and thick stories, punctuated with spitting and oaths strong enough to carry a tower of Babel. Lily opened her eyes and ears, heaping it all up, storing it all away behind her stubborn forehead. . . . And new people, new people: "families," "brothers," "sisters," troupes, troupes, troupes! Or else stars by themselves, "bests," "uniques:" a female-impersonator, a green-eyed boy who wagged his hips like the very devil and took off the girls; Poland, a Warsaw Jewess, a red-headed, over-scented beauty, who did the "Parisienne;" and ever and ever so many others. And Lily, so slender and frail, was the pet of them all. They called her their pretty baby, their *petite chérie* and, with their painted mugs, kissed her full on the lips.

Pa detested this "rotten lot" and Pa was not always in a good temper. Lily was "under age" again! Why, there were even managers who informed the police, so as to be on the safe side. . . . "Travelling with her parents; childish tricks; nothing difficult." . . . Ma's indignation knew no bounds: what nonsense to prevent a great big girl of fifteen from earning her living! For she aged Lily as much as she could, to obtain the permission, when no papers were asked for; and she had trained Lily to reply



to the indiscreet questions of the officials: were her tricks hard? Was she forced into doing them? Lily answered mechanically that she liked the bike very much. And then they gave her leave to perform.

As for practising, permission or none, that was nobody's damned business. And, if some old sheep took to bleating—"Poor child, you'll be the death of her!"—Pa sent the old sheep to eat coke; and it was:

"Up, Lily! Get on your bike! Look alive!"

And the bloomers that Lily wore out! Ma was kept busy in the dressing-room mending the rents at the knees and patching the seats:

"What a tomboy!" Ma cried.

And this went on for months and months. And then came Chicago, Pa's visit to the agents and a contract with the New York Olympians, a variety-show coming from the west and returning to New York by Columbus and Pittsburg. And new people, new people; stars of every kind: the Para woman, a rheumatic juggler, who was obliged to change her turn and become an exhibitor of performing parrots, a ragged, moulting troupe, picked up cheap at second-hand; an infant prodigy who topped the bill, a boy-violinist, leading an orchestra, too, at fourteen, a pretentious little humbug trained to make a few movements, while others did the work. Lily thought him so good-looking, she simply couldn't take her eyes off him. And then she had some big girl-friends who had had love-affairs! They were the Three Graces, gymnasts endowed with bodies like so many Apollos, honest German faces and a bewildering amount of strength, pluck and precision. . . .

"What smackings that must have taken!" thought Pa.

But no, their uncle and manager, Mr. Fuchs—a name as famous in its way as Martello's—was known for his gentleness and adored and coddled and pampered by

the Three Graces, who, at a sign from "Nunkie," joyously rushed to practice, taking a pride in pleasing their dear Nunkie.

"The old rogue!" said Pa enviously. "He has an easy time; while I, with my skinny kitten, damn it . . .!"

Well, well, he mustn't complain, as he himself admitted: one more rung he'd mounted, thanks to his Lily, that engagement with the best variety-show in the States; nothing but big theatres: Orpheums! Dominions! And New York next! And then London! Things were moving, moving! And Pa looked lovingly at his Lily, as she played at being grown up with the Three Graces, in the train on Sunday, travelling from town to town, while Ma was knitting things for her tomboy. He talked to Mr. Fuchs as between equals, as between man and man, as between the manager of a star and the owner of a troupe; and the train rushed on, rushed on, with the dull sound of the engine-bell, now and again, when they crossed a street. Mr. Fuchs, heavy-jawed, slow of speech, said that he had had enough of travelling, at his age, if it were not for his dear nieces. He would like to retire to the country, to his little home, and grow his roses, as soon as he had married off his dear nieces, which would not be long, no doubt. As it was, one of them, Thea, the one who did five pullings-up with her left hand, had his permission to receive letters from her sweetheart, a young man at St. Louis, quite well-off. The idyll made good Mr. Fuchs blossom into a genial smile: family life! Simple joys! The only true ones! Worth more than the stage! And Nunkie talked and talked: the Parisienne, a perpetual scandal! And wait a bit: what was that he heard at an agent's the other day? Yes, the daughter of his old friend Martello, Ave Maria her name was, had left her brother and run away from Mexico with a man! Tut, tut, the things one saw nowadays!

Pa hardly listened to the old crock, preferred to dream of New York and the success his Lily would achieve there! And Lily, sitting close by, listened with all her ears, puckered her little forehead: love, love. . . . And Ave Maria, who had run away with a man. . . . Why with a man? And she squeezed up against Thea, the Grace who was in love . . . put question after question. . . . She talked of "her" boy-violinist, of Trampy. . . . And they all laughed boisterously, with heads thrown back, full-throated, and Nunkie, very paternally, congratulated Mr. Clifton on his daughter's prettiness.

"For goodness' sake, don't go putting it into her head that she's nice-looking, the little devil!" protested Ma. "That would be the last straw!"

The arrival in New York was a disappointment to Pa. The authorities insisted on seeing the papers this time. Lily was under age, just as at 'Frisco. What! Why? . . . Because of former scandals, it appeared: Martello and Ave Maria. What had he, a British subject, to do with those Dagoes who spoil the profession, growled Pa. He ended by rebelling against the injustice of it, he thought of the Three Graces hard at work rehearsing under Nunkie's eye, while he, Clifton, had not even the right to set foot on a stage and let Lily practise there. To work, to work, damn it! And he locked her up all day in her room to do her balancings, the boomerang on the front-wheel, the standstill on the back-wheel, or the bike upside down, with Lily standing on the pedals, like a convict on the treadmill. . . . The pack of fools! Because a Dago had whipped his sister, wasn't a Pa to have the right to bring his own daughter up? To work, to work! And he kept her at it for hours and hours, watching and knitting his brows, like a sage pondering over the solution of a problem.

Lily, breathless, would turn a look of entreaty upon her Ma, but Mrs. Clifton, with her nose bent over her work, pretended not to see, obstinately went on cutting out, patching, sewing her tomboy's bloomers. Lily longed for Trampy. . . .

At night, Pa ran from theatre to theatre : from Fourteenth Street, where they lodged, to Twenty-third Street ; took the elevated to Fifty-eighth Street, to Hundred-and-twenty-fifth Street ! All theatres at which Lily would have triumphed but for those dirty Dagoes ! And the things that were served up to the public, pooh ! Clifton laughed with scorn : troupes of English dancing-girls—the famous Roofers—with movements like stuffed dolls ; and cyclists, pooh ! Hauptmanns, fat freaks turned out in Berlin : if that was the best they could do, pooh ! Oh, if he only had the right to send his New Zealander on Wheels scooting in among their legs, just to show the public what a star really was ! And all the morning he ran about the town talking of “ childish tricks—a big girl ” to the police and “ wonderful tricks—the only girl of her age who can do them ” to the agents in St. James's Building. Oh, if he could have London ! He longed to measure his strength against all those famous names—Marjutti, Laurence, the Pawnees—just to show them his Lily !

And now it was the last stage. All around stretched the dark sea ; and the liner sped—thud, thud, thud—through a gloomy set. Three days more and then Liverpool ; and London at last ! Pa was about to realize his dream. He had signed, at last, for the Castle, in London ! It was all right, it was all right ! Prospects fine ! And Kellermann was on board ; it seemed a sign of good luck ! He was travelling with his architect. Kellermann, the great English manager—Pa knew them all by name—

Kellermann, the man for whom a whole nation of "artistes" toiled and moiled nightly. Pa had caught a glimpse of him. . . He would have liked to introduce his Lily to him; no matter, he would know her one day, when she was starring in his halls! . . . And on the Bill and Boom Tour! . . . And elsewhere! . . . She would be famous before long. . . .

Ma, who remained lying in her bunk, sucking lemons, would have liked to have her Lily by her, within call, to keep her mother company, that great big girl, spoilt by her Pa, even when she was not performing, as in New York . . . a new cloak and boots and gewgaws . . . A couple of fools together, that's what Ma called them! And she needed watching, that tomboy, who would break her leg one of these days, tumbling up and down the companion-way. But Lily preferred to enjoy herself on deck, and expended on running about the energies which she no longer had to devote to her practising. Her accumulated weariness disappeared under the influence of the sleep and the good meals, which she had not the boredom of having to get ready, as in Fourteenth Street, where Lily, big girl that she was, had to help her Ma.

She flitted all over the deck, munching candies, showed everybody her new boots and her red cloak, held her head high, was very proud of being looked at. Lily dreamt of the Three Graces; of the boy-violinist; of Trampy. She made conquest upon conquest, down to the electrician of the ship, quite a young lad, who looked as cold as ice.

She sometimes stopped at his door, watched him handling levers, pressing buttons. It was like the switchboard of a theatre. She pointed to this and to that. The lad smiled, told the New Zealander on Wheels all about his little world, explained things:

"This makes day. That makes night!"

As for Lily, she was going to star in London, where her Pa would cover her with diamonds! And she went on to tell him stories, like a little school-girl who has read a book or two: India, two eyes glittering in the dark, gee! And elephants she had known; little birds which she had kept in a cage, in Natal; and kangaroos. And the lion, who stands on his hind legs when he's angry; and the tiger, who lies down flat. And parrots. And starry nights in Africa: stars "that big." And storms: waves "miles high!" And successes at Gangpur; and in Chicago, where she shared a dressing-room with three girls who, when they were undressed, were all over muscles, just like men. She liked the bike well enough, but those falls: oh, damn it!

"That little monkey has seen everything in her time," thought Jimmy, the electrician.

And he mused upon the numberless things which she had seen, the countries, the cities, and all that she would yet see, in her life as a wandering star, while he would remain walled up in his cabin, with his nose to the switch-board.

And the steamer sped—thud, thud, thud—over the dark sea, where the noise of the waves sounded like the roar of multitudes of men. Huge clouds in the east were tinged with red, as though London were about to loom above the horizon in all its glory, filling the vast expanse with its rumours and its lights. . . .

## PART FIRST

# CURTAIN RISES

### I

"LILY? Who's Lily? . . . A New Zealander: really? Oh, well, we'll look into the matter. . . . It'll be settled later on. . . ."

Clifton, when he returned home that evening, gnawed his moustache and clenched his fists with rage. Ah, he would not forget his arrival in London! To get there and be chucked! Was that what he had come from New York for? To discover that he had made a fool of himself, to see Lily's place at the Castle filled by another troupe of Hauptmanns: the Hauptmanns again, those fat freaks? And nothing to be said or done?

" . . . Engagement not valid. . . . Ought at least to have waited for the London agency's signed contract, before leaving. . . ."

Intent upon his vexations of the moment, he described his day to Mrs. Clifton. What had staggered him, done for him, was his visit to the agent, where they hadn't seemed to know Lily.

He had rushed at once to others, just to show them who Miss Lily was! But he got the same reply wherever he went:

"Lily? Who's Lily? Let's see the photo."

And would Mrs. Clifton ever believe, asked the indig-

nant Pa, what they said when they handed him back the photo? Yes, to him, the father, to his face, they said :

“She’s too thin, that Lily of yours !”

“If that’s the way they welcome British subjects returning to the mother-country, it’s jolly encouraging, on my word it is !” said Clifton, angrily flinging his cigar through the window. “If that’s the way they receive you . . . What’s the good of training artistes, if you’re to be judged by weight ?”

Ma, among the open boxes, listened and said nothing. She was exasperated. Their entry into the metropolis struck her, too, as anything but triumphal. For all her dislike of those breakneck trades, for all her contempt for the bike, she displayed even more anxiety than Pa. With those fat freaks at the Castle, if engagements continued scarce, how would they manage, later on, lost in that huge London, with no money and with a child to feed? Her vanity was wounded as well. She had dreamt of dazzling her sister-in-law, making them all burst with jealousy over the splendid engagement at the Castle; and now everything was slipping from their hands, on the very day of their arrival, and there was nothing for them but to sit at home and keep quiet.

But Pa, the next day, tore through London like one possessed, grinding his teeth and clenching his fists, railing at everybody, himself included. He thought of Lily, who had lost a week on the voyage and who was now messing about in the house, instead of practising her bike. The idea pursued him, clung to him; but his perseverance was indomitable, his courage ready to face anything or anybody. Lily should perform at the Castle! She had come to perform there and perform there she should! There were more visits to the agent and to this one and that one, to one and all, indefatigable visits. Clifton insisted on his Lily’s merits, pulled out his pocket-book,



bursting with press-cuttings, offered to prove his statements. The agents, on their side, had made enquiries. Lily was very clever for her age : a little thin it was true, but very graceful ; and the New Zealander on Wheels ought to get on. Clifton would work up her turn, no doubt. And, at last, Pa obtained a promise in writing—and signed—of an engagement in eight months' time . . . at the Castle, damn it !

An engagement in eight months was better than nothing ; but what to do in the meanwhile ? It wasn't the money question that bothered him ; Pa had money ; but Lily worried him : he wanted work for Lily, bike all the time and hard at it. Now, London was closed to him ; he couldn't let her perform in London before appearing at the Castle ; that was in the contract ; and there was nothing for the provinces.

His tenacity continued to do him good service. He got a few offers, in the London suburbs ; that could do him no harm, he knew, though his Lily did appear at Dulwich, Deptford or West Ham : who would think of going there to discover that shrimp ? . . . Damn their impudence ! And meantime the shrimp would work and her day would come, you pack of fat freaks, you !

Pa, on the whole, was satisfied. To show Lily, that was all he asked for ! He was quieter, now that she could practise. And Lily, also, felt delighted and relieved. At first it was jolly, doing nothing ; but to be always at home with Ma had its drawbacks : only the other day, because she had asked for a tam-o'-shanter with a feather in it, like those she saw the little girls wear in the street, she had nearly had a box on the ear, the extravagant little beast, who would bring them all to the workhouse !

Better biking with Pa, from morning till night, and only coming home after the show. Besides, away from the work, Pa was nice to her : a packet of sweets here, a bunch

of violets there ; and then there were the train journeys out of London and back, over the roofs : all those little yellow houses, with white curtains, and those little backyards, no bigger than that—real doll's houses, all alike—and such lots of little chimneys, such lots and lots of little chimneys ; and those gorgeous posters : Hippodrome, Olympia, Bovril, mustard, elephants, the Hauptmanns. Pa wouldn't look at them, those fat freaks ; but, oh, if he had them here—and a whip—just for five minutes . . . and the chance of saying a word or two ! To think that they were working at the Castle, while he was puff-puffing out to the suburbs ! And he racked his brain, as he travelled over the town : that town which he had to conquer and which was veiled from him between-whiles by the curtain of posters in the railway-stations, on the hoardings, everywhere, again, again ; and imperial troupes and royal troupes, endless troupes, arrays of pink tights, lines of legs uplifted amid a flight of scarlet skirts, alternating with Sunlight and Van Houten and national and colonial troupes, loud as a trumpet-blare and with nothing behind them, he dared say. . . .

Those "troupes," those "families"—he turned it all over in his mind—yes, they judged talent by weight ; the public wanted a lot for its money : well, why shouldn't he have a troupe ? Why not ? Lily—he had noticed it in the few shows she had given—Lily didn't cut much of a figure in London : five stone of flesh and bones, a mite, a minnow, a nothing. Well, if Lily wasn't enough by herself, he'd give them more : a whole troupe, if need be ! Why, he'd set about it at once !

With his customary determination, yielding to a fixed idea, Pa devoted himself to it. And, in the halls, at the agents', in the bars, at the Internationale Artisten-Klause in Lisle Street, that universal meeting-place, Pa, ever on the watch, strove to make people talk, listened with all

his ears, took notes. It was very difficult to get at the real facts ; one had to ferret them out ; the owners of the troupes jealously concealed their methods, endeavoured to put you off, talked of apprentices at five or six shillings a day, plus food and expenses. Pa saw through these tricks and, to arrive at the true facts, discounted the six shillings down to sixpence. Lily, her Pa's own daughter, easily obtained information from the apprentices themselves, which she afterward repeated to him. In a month's time, he knew almost as much about it as Mr. Fuchs. He studied *The Era*, got the names by heart : the managers, the " Pas," the " bosses," the " profs." He got acquainted with some of them personally : old Martello, for instance, the father of Ave Maria and the Bambinis. Martello could have given Pa hints ; but he no longer interested himself in anything except his Bambinis, whom the poor man, grown calm with age and overwork, was now spoiling. The rest left him indifferent ; he hardly listened, spoke in short sentences, like a man too old to care :

" Train apprentices ? What's the good ? . . . Run a troupe ? Pooh, madness ! "

Pa thought this exclusive admiration very touching, but it wasn't what he wanted ; and, madness or not, damn it, he was resolved to carry out his idea to the end !

There were imperial and royal troupes, " Risleys," carpet acrobats, pyramids of tumblers, some of them undergoing an apprenticeship of cuffs and thumps. Pa was not interested in these methods, did not approve of them ; he had never knocked Lily about, never let her fall on purpose—" Have I, Lily ? "—whereas, in the " imperial " and " royal," they sent the apprentice sprawling on his back, just to teach him, when he started wrong.

Still, all these were boys ; and it was the little girls that interested him, for he meant to have only girls among his apprentices. The rest wasn't his damned business ; but

the different troupes of Roofer girls, for instance, affected him directly : where did old Roofer fish those girls out ? That's what Pa wanted to know. He had even, in order to see the school, pretended to bring Lily there as a pupil. He had been to the place in Broad Street, where they turned out " sisters " by the gross ; had watched the squads in knickerbockers, scattered over the immense room, like recruits drilling in a barrack-yard : groups engaged in club-swinging, juggling, clog-dancing, all together, a tangle of different movements timed " one, two, three ! " Roofer chose among the heap, sorted out the sizes, called this lot the Merry Wives, that lot the Crazy Things, christened them after an insect or a flower, packed them up in lots of ten or twelve girls, with snub-noses or Greek profiles, as preferred, despatched them, carriage-paid, C. O. D., with words, music and muslin skirts complete, and every day received a detailed account of his Honeysuckles and Bees, scattered all over the world, from the Klondike to Calcutta.

This superlative organization produced upon Pa the effect of a state affair : it was something beyond him, above him ; it interested him especially from the recruiting point of view ; and what stimulated him above all was the troupes of trick cyclists. He had seen plenty of them in America, but then, wholly occupied as he was with his Lily, they did not interest him, whereas now he was seeking to fathom their lives, so that he might know. Some of them, who went cheap, slept three in a bed, niggers and whites all mixed ; others, who were well paid, lived easily and comfortably and pushed themselves forward with less work and for more money than Lily, Lily who possessed artistic talent and who had toiled harder than all the rest of them put together ! Patience, his turn would come . . . when she was a bit less thin ! And he would have the troupe of troupes, he'd show them, jolly soon !

Mrs. Clifton was terrified at her husband's boldness, but dared not protest ; however, she observed that it was a big undertaking.

" We shall have five apprentices," interrupted Clifton—" six including Lily. We must find lodgings."

" But, dear . . . ! "

" Don't you think . . . ? "

" Yes, dear."

As for the apprentices, he would see to that to-morrow. Ma suggested that her sister-in-law's daughter might do, but Pa wouldn't have relatives at any price—blubbering for a smacking bestowed upon their daughters—he knew all about them, thank you. Let such sheep bleat elsewhere. No, give him strangers. He could be freer with them and get as many as he wished. An advertisement in *The Daily Mail*—" Wanted, young girls for trick cycling "—fetched them the same day. The pavement before the house was blocked with white aprons, sailor-hats and tam-o'-shanters. There were consumptive-looking girls, long hanks of girls, chunky girls, faces like pussy-cats', mugs like bull-terriers', all crowding outside the door, until the landlady drove them away with her broom and threatened to do as much for Pa and Ma, if all the street-arabs of London were to go on soiling her nice white steps.

Pa, for that matter, found nothing in the bunch, not one in twenty that was any good ; or else they made exorbitant demands : two shillings a day those guttersnipes expected—as though shillings were to be had for the asking ! But why look so far ? There were girls, sometimes, at the back-entrances of the theatres : stage-struck kids who devoured Lily with their eyes and looked at Pa as though to say, " Take me, take me ! " That's what he wanted, damn it, girls who had the business in their blood and who wouldn't go whining over a professional slap or two, which

he dared say he'd have to distribute, to make up for lost time !

The first girl whom he engaged he had already seen gazing ecstatically at Lily, as they left the theatre, far away down the Mile End Road, and he saw her again, one morning, in front of his house in the very heart of London ! He could not believe his eyes. She must have followed his scent, slept on the threshold like a lost dog. . . . Her Pa ? Gone away. Her Ma ? Dead. Her name ? Maud. Her age ? Didn't know. Born somewhere in the immensity of Whitechapel, tow-headed, round-faced. Nothing to eat for two days. She'd do ! . . . He would go to the police-court, get the licence later ; meantime, he netted her . . . and that was one !

As regards the others, he had to make a selection. He chose them, by preference, in families which were overstocked with brats, so that one more or less, in the heap, made no difference. He got one this way : that made two ! Next, a "local girl," seized with ambition, came and offered herself : three ! He found two others : a little Beak Street shop-girl and a Shoreditch Jewess. That made five. It did not take him long to judge the girls. He gave them a few days' trial before signing a contract ; and what an anxiety for them, Mr. Clifton's final decision ! If one trembled too much, was caught holding Pa's shoulder for no reason, for fear of falling, or blubbered because of a scratch on the skin, her fate was settled.

"Pack up, my lady," Pa would say, quite calmly.

There was no getting out of it : off she had to go, before dinner, and home she went, through the gloomy streets, after a brief glimpse of paradise.

He had to replace some of them : they were slack, or else, independent at times, they looked at him, for the least push, as if they would fly at his throat. He asked

himself whether he wouldn't be compelled to get some over from Germany or else to pick up on the highroads, in the gipsies' caravans, children with skins tanned like donkeys', a troupe of blackamoors on wheels, who, perched on the handle-bars of the bikes, would have looked like cockroaches mounted as brooches, damn it !

However, by dint of selection, he ended by having only good ones left ; and then he made a contract in due form with the parents for three years, or even five, such was his faith in the future ! A few pence a week to the family, a few pence to the hussy herself : he to dress, lodge and board her and engage to make an artiste of her. Everything was provided for : during the training, just the board and the rest ; when she began to work, a shilling a day in addition. Over and above, she would be looked after by a lady, Mrs. Clifton. Was that all right ? Both parties signed . . . the girl was an artiste, became a New Zealander.

They brought their little wardrobe : one spare chemise, on the average, one pair of stockings ; their only protection against the weather was the dress they had on, a factory-girl's ulster and a tam-o'-shanter. Later, when performing, they would be entitled to a celluloid collar, satinette knickers and pumps.

Pa, though at first he took one extra room and then two in the same house and though he, also, made his apprentices sleep three in a bed, Pa soon found himself cramped. It would have been nice to have a little house somewhere in good air, next door to the country. But there was one thing which made Pa decide to remain in the West Central district : Jimmy, the young electrician with whom Lily used to chat on shipboard, had given up travelling. Kellermann and his architect had noticed him on board and the great man had engaged him to manage the electric installation of his theatres. Jimmy had taken possession of a lodging in Gresse Street, Tottenham Court

Road. He slept over the shop, which, for the rest, served him rather as a place in which to keep the tools for his outside work. Pa often ran upon him in the neighbourhood and had a nodding acquaintance with him which turned out to be useful, as Jimmy, being in Kellermann's employment, was more or less at home in the variety-theatres and nothing was easier than for him to obtain leave for Clifton to practise on the stage. This it was that persuaded Clifton to settle in the West End. In any case, it would be cheaper than dragging the six girls and himself daily from one end of London to the other. The house in which he took up his quarters, in Rathbone Place, quite close to Jimmy, was small and dark, but not dear. The upper story was occupied by people who were out all day and the basement served as a lumber-room. They would feel quite at home here . . . with no old sheep to listen at the keyholes !

And then he would have slept in the parks, if necessary, anywhere, rather than waste more precious time. His Lily, his troupe, before everything ! What he wanted was to get a move on them. He went so far as to engage a boy, a shoeblack at the corner of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road for the rest of the time, to attend to the bikes and the girls when at practice.

Pa gave his mind to the gear, the expenses, the general business. Ma saw to good order, to domestic discipline. It was no longer the quiet life of a Pa and Ma trotting round the world in the company of their one and only bread-winning star. As for Lily, the daughter of the boss and manager, she owed a good example to one and all. In the morning, with Maud, she went down to the kitchen, lit the stove, made the coffee. Next, she carried up breakfast to Pa and Ma in bed, distributed their rations to the famished girls. And off they went, all six of them, with Pa following at their heels. . . .



The stage-door gave the apprentices a thrill, the first day they entered. The passage, gently sloping, tall and wide, because of the scenery, smelt of elephants and cheap scent. It was blocked with properties, with queer-shaped cases, flat as a slab or round as a ball. There were long, narrow boxes, for the horizontal bars ; sometimes a row of wicker coffins, with a ventriloquist's figures inside. And labels from everywhere—Melbourne, Chicago, Berlin, Lisbon—and " Rlys." and " S. S." that made you feel in the hold of a liner, off to foreign parts.

At the end, beyond an iron door, was the stage, very dark, pricked here and there with electric lamps. There were things that glittered with spangles. To the girls it seemed like the Kingdom of Puss-in-Boots or Blue-Beard ; but to Lily it was an old story. She was a little like the school-girl, in the good old days, for whom the master was always waiting, cane in hand. The rest she didn't care about.

Nevertheless, huge as the stage was, there was not always room to practise : ponies or elephants would monopolize it for hours at a time. Or else, when Roofer was supplying a ballet, he took up the whole stage, all day long. Lily, secretly delighted, sat down modestly in a corner, so as to be in no one's way. Roofer made his collection of calves and ankles flutter about, followed the new dances with an expert eye, throwing his hat back on his head, mopping his forehead, grumbling, finding fault :

" Don't eat chocolates while you're dancing, you, Eva !  
Hi, you, Gwendolen ! "

And, to emphasize his remarks, he threw his felt hat at them.

" Silly ass ! " thought Pa, with a grin. " To think you can train artistes like that. You'll use up fifty hats, you old fool, while my belt remains as good as new ! "

For that was now Pa's system, the strap—" *à la*

*Mexico!*”—not that he used it often nor very hard ; but he terrorized Lily with it ; and the other girls were afraid of it, too, though they never got more than the threat, seeing that they were apprentices, who might have run away if he had struck out.

All this did not prevent them from working with a will—trot, trot, trot—when there were no Roofers on the stage and no elephants or ponies : yoop, on to the bikes and the fun began ! The sight of Pa training his star made the apprentices shake in their knickers. Lily was to do everything and to do it very well. Pa ran after her, in a never-ending circle, and, from the corner of his eye, watched Tom, who held the girls and made them work, upon his instructions ; and, when they got off their bikes, to wipe their foreheads :

“Bravo, Miss Woolly-legs !” said Pa sarcastically. “Tired, eh ? Dead, eh ? Suppose you tried to get up again . . . and be quick about it ! And as for you, Tom, don’t let them fall, or I’ll catch you one on the side of the head !”

For Pa knew by experience that their little ladyships shirked work ; that they shook with fright ; that they lost confidence after a bad fall ; and that then it was finished, nothing to be done with them : they’d let themselves be killed sooner.

Maud, for instance, that Jonah, ever after, one day, she had seen her blood flow, trembled before her bike like a sheep that scents the slaughter-house. It was no use Pa’s threatening her with his belt : she wouldn’t let herself go, on the contrary, held on to everything, no matter what, for fear of falling. He ought to have sent her away long ago ; he would pack her off that very night . . . and made no bones about telling her so, the Jonah !

Then Pa, giving Lily a rest, occupied himself with the girls : taught them the principle of the standstill, of

side-riding, of the "swan," of the "frog." And—quick! —the indefatigable Pa went back to Lily, made her begin a trick ten times, twenty times over, so great was his rage at the lost time, the elephants, the Hauptmanns, Roofer. He pulled faces, clenched his fists :

"Why don't you do as I say, when I tell you, damn it!"

"But, Pa, I can't!" protested Lily.

"You can, if you like," said Pa, exasperated this time and unbuckling his belt.

Crash! A heap behind him, a medley of limbs and steel fittings! Maud, who was still trying, on her bike, startled by Pa's threatening movement, had fallen flat down.

"Maud again! That damned Jonah!" cried Pa, going up to her. "Well, Miss Woolly-legs, do you mean to stay there all night?"

But she did not move; and, when they had disentangled her from the bike, Pa saw an eye that was quite red and a little stream of blood trickling down her cheek.

"Let's look!" said Pa anxiously.

A spoke sprung from the rim had scratched her eye.

It was a serious accident. Sprained wrists, barked shins didn't count; but a spoke in the eye...! Luckily, Maud had no relations; there was no claim to be feared: not a vestige of an old sheep on the mother's side. Pa said all this to himself, as he ran to the chemist; and Lily consoled poor Maud as best she could, said that, after all, it was part of the game: she'd know better another time, eh? She'd be a great star yet, eh, Maud?

The poor maimed thing lifted her face to Lily, stammered through her tears that it was nothing... all right again now... Pa's fault, with his belt.

"For a little thing like that!" said Lily, laughing.

"Fancy falling from your bike for that! Why, I'd

rather have twenty 'contracts on the back' than lose an eye!"

For that was what it amounted to. Pa realized it, after he had dressed the wound. Clifton's mind was not at ease: a glass eye was not a very difficult matter. . . . but, who knows, some meddlesome person might inform Kellermann, who stood no nonsense on that subject. Fortunately the artistes present had not paid much attention . . . had hardly noticed anything in the dim light of the stage. . . .

And, soon after, the New Zealanders were walking back to Rathbone Place, with Maud in their midst, her head a roll of bandages, leaning on Lily's arm.

It was a pathetic home-coming. Ma had told them what would happen! That would teach them to take in vagabonds from the streets. Mrs. Clifton thought that, in a respectable house . . .

"That'll do," said Pa, dropping into the easy-chair in the dining-room. "I'm worn out. If you'd been like me, Mrs. Clifton, running after those Woolly-legs all the morning"—and he pointed to the apprentices, standing round the table—"gee, you wouldn't talk so much! I'll take Maud to the hospital this afternoon; it's only a trifle. Is dinner ready?"

"Yes, dear."

"Come along, then, all of you Woolly-legs," said Pa jovially.

Pa was sorry for poor Maud, but he felt a need to shed a little gaiety, to extenuate the accident as far as possible, to turn it into a joke, so as to prevent his girls from becoming panic-stricken. He talked of heads smashed to a jelly, of legs in smithereens, of a bicyclist who had had not one, but both eyes caught in the chain. As for himself, when he was a small boy—that was in the time when they brought up artistes, real ones, mind you; not, as nowadays,

on sugar and sweets ; no, real ones, trained with the whip and the stick, damn it—why, the accidents which he'd seen ! Yes, he himself, to go no farther, could have shown them—here, there, there, here . . . damn it, all over his body—scars deep enough to put your finger in !

“ Eh ? Frightens you, does it ? Never fear ! ” added Pa, in a good-humoured voice. “ That sort of thing won't happen to any of you Woolly-legs ; a good Irish stew is better than a kick of the pedal, eh ? ”

And Pa, after a last cup of strong tea, dismissed the girls, lit his pipe, threw himself into the easy-chair, with his legs long out in front of him ; but soon :

“ Well, Maud, what is it ? What are you crying for now ? I tell you, I'll buy you a glass one,” said Pa, at the sight of Maud, who, glued to her chair, sat blubbering silently, instead of getting up to go.

Poor lost dog ! Clifton, at the theatre, had threatened to send her packing. She knew what that meant : leaving Miss Lily, losing those good meals. . . .

“ What are you crying about, when all is said and done ? ” insisted Pa.

Maud faltered something about packing up ; pain in her eye ; not her fault.

“ So what you want is to stay with us ? ” asked Pa.

“ Oh ! ” gasped Maud.

“ Well, then, stay ! But no more bike ; you shall be Lily's lady's-maid,” said Pa, puffing at his pipe.

It went down so well, as an effort of dry humour, that Ma could not help laughing. But Mr. Clifton was talking seriously. Then Ma, amazed, protested : what, a servant in her house ! A lady's-maid for Lily ! He would end by giving her the moon ! And what would Lily do all day ? She'd sit twiddling her thumbs ! Had Mr. Clifton thought of that ?

Yes, Mr. Clifton had thought of it. He was too tired

to explain his reasons ; but take it from him, it was best like that. Pa, in fact, feared lest that smashed eye might prove a worry to him : the papers weren't in order ; he had made no declaration to the police ; there was the Workmen's Compensation Act. . . . Much better keep Maud safe in the house, for a while :

" Lily won't sit twiddling her thumbs for all that, will you, Lily ? " continued Pa, smiling to his star. . . .

A touch of the brush and comb, a stroll through the streets with the girls, by leave of Pa, who liked Lily to take the air, then home again, more housework. . . . The apprentices, who did not yet perform in public, were sent to bed early, while Lily, escorted by Pa, went off to East, West, South or North London. An hour to get there ; then undress, dress, appear on the stage under Pa's eye, undress and dress again ; another hour to get back ; a morsel of cold Irish stew, a cup of tea ; and drowsily up to her room and bed. . . .

## II

“ LILY ! ”

Ma's voice woke her with a start in the morning. Lily dressed quickly and quickly ran down-stairs to the kitchen, where Maud had gone before her ; and it was the same thing every day, except on tour, when discipline was less strict. It had gone on for months and months, for two years, ever since they came to London. Pa, with his iron will, had overcome everything. He felt at home in the old country, at last. After his engagements in the London suburbs, he had obtained a triumph at the Castle, a Bill and Boom tour of forty weeks, a season at Blackpool, the Kellermann tour now, successes everywhere. Before his boyish little girls, before his own particular troupe, the fat freaks trembled in their knickers ! For Clifton, the new-comer, but yesterday unknown, it was an un-hoped-for success and fame and fortune.

Ma nearly always remained in London with Maud. Lily was not big enough yet to need the supervision of a Ma. Therefore, on tour,—when she was not practising with Pa—Lily did the catering, saw to the porridge and the Irish stew. Pa was not hard to please. Provided Lily was “ great ” on the stage, he asked for nothing more. Food burnt for want of butter, salad mixed in the wash-hand basin : he swallowed everything with a zest, ate standing, with his plate on the basket trunk, or else seated with the girls round a little table hardly large enough for three. This Bohemian life pleased him. He loved youth, gaiety and good-fellowship. He was fond of a laugh, took

Lily on his knee after dinner, played with her, praised her home-made cakes, her tough chops, and then began talking bike to her, who hated bikes and who got something different from a hat flung at her, when she missed a trick !

No matter, she preferred touring to staying in London. The work was the same, but, at least, it was a change. She was spoilt by every one, down to that landlady who cried when she left. . . . After all, there were many worse off than she, girls everlastingly set about by "profs," confined to their rooms all day to practise their balancings ; she'd had a taste of it in New York ; no, thank you ! She preferred having good times with the girls, practical jokes, boxing-matches even, scrimmages, pillow-fights. In the boarding-houses, they flirted with the boys ; they kept pet pigeons, white mice, a lizard ; they exchanged secrets, stories of every country, professionals all ! Sometimes, they consoled one another ; promised to send kisses—x x x —on post-cards. And then there were new faces, always ; a week in each town, no longer ; a real life of adventure from one end of England to the other. Now it wasn't like that in London ; she felt less free there. Ma was particular and hard to please ; there were no pillow-fights, no romps : Ma hated those ways. The stage, yes, she put up with that because it was Lily's profession ; but one came in contact with all sorts there ; and that little devil of a Lily was wicked enough as it was ! It took all the home influence to thwart the bad examples which she received outside ; and it was Ma's business to see to it.

The house in Rathbone Place had been smartened up. There was a dining-room which was used only for meals and which never had a bed put into it at night. There were things on what-nots : little photograph-frames, loose photos, lucky charms, china cups ; all shining and bright, thanks to the engagement of a lady's-maid, as Pa called Maud, in his funny way. At first, after the accident, it



was terrible. Maud's natural awkwardness was made worse by a glass eye ; she could not tell one side from the other, spilt the tea on the cloth, broke the crockery. She did the heavy work, washed and scrubbed all day long. When the girls were in London, she went with them to the theatre as dresser. She stood in the wings and admired the New Zealanders whirling about in the light. She stretched out her face in ecstasy towards Lily : that Lily who had travelled everywhere, who was born so far away, in a land full of monkeys and parrots. She followed Lily to her dressing-room, trotted after her like a dog, worshipped her open-mouthed.

Lily had ripened out, was becoming more attractive, more of a woman daily, despite the fact that her Pa still treated her like a kid. She no longer looked at things from the point of view of the child-girl who had been delighted with a satin hair-ribbon in India ; now her pride was not appeased with such trifles. Ma, according to Lily, seemed ashamed of her, dressed her badly : an odd skirt here, an odd frock there, of a cheap make, was not what Lily wanted. She was an artiste : she wanted a hat with big feathers and a gown with gold braid to it ; but, when she showed Ma a dress which she liked in the shop-windows, Ma would exclaim :

"What do you want with that ? My poor Lily, you must be mad ! That's for rich little girls, girls who have time to be pretty ; it wouldn't suit you at all. Why, if we listened to you, we'd soon be in the workhouse !"

Ma always said no, pretending she had no money, whereas Lily knew to the contrary. She knew that the troupe earned a great deal and that the troupe was herself. The other day, at the theatre, she had heard her aunt, who felt bitter because Mr. Clifton had not accepted her Daisy—who could have learnt the business and, later on, have starred by herself !—she had heard that "old sheep" say, speaking of her :

“What a shame to dress her like that! A girl who brings them in capital to invest!”

So Pa was investing capital! She didn't quite know what investing capital meant; no doubt it meant making a lot of money. She asked for none of it! Children belong to their parents! But she would have liked to be treated with more consideration, to be spoilt, to get presents, nice things. She had plenty from her Pa, true enough: presents, my! But they were cheap gifts, for all that. . . . She was always having promises made her of more important things; and the promises were never kept: that gold watch, for instance. She had a thirst for luxury. And it seemed to her that she was being treated like a performing dog, not a bit better. Ma, without exactly knowing, but with an infallible instinct, saw all this budding under that stubborn forehead. Mr. Clifton might see nothing in it; but it was not so easy to take in a mother! Was there a love-affair beneath it all, Ma asked herself. No, not yet; it might come later, as with that apprentice who had run away, or that other one whom she had to send packing for being too free with the men. But Lily would not leave them like that!

She did not let her go out. “Glass-eye Maud” ran the errands and Lily stayed at home, like a good little girl of whom her mother wished to make a lady. When she did happen to go out, she must not be long, or else it was:

“Where have you been? Tell me at once!”

At the theatre, when Pa lost his temper, she could reckon on a mighty smack; and then it was over: Pa was sorry, rather than otherwise. Ma, on the contrary, would nag for hours; muttered inarticulate phrases about “devil,” “wild bull,” and “taming her;” there was no end to it. Lily champed the bit! A star, indeed! Was that being a star? She thought differently! She had seen others drive up to the theatre in their motors, accom-

panied by gentlemen carrying flowers, like that famous "Mdle." at the Palace. Yes, those were stars: they dined at the Horse Shoe and did not spend their time in useless house-work. She was quite sick and tired of that life! She'd had enough of it. Meanwhile, the days passed and the weeks and it was always the same thing: house-work and stage-work; work, work, work. . . .

It was late that morning; they were not practising. Pa had run down on the previous day, to see a troupe of cyclists, the famous Pawnees, who were back from the Continent, on their way to New York, and performing that week at the Brighton Hippodrome. Lily was in her room later than usual, as Ma was not awake. Maud had gone down to the kitchen. The apprentices were getting up, joking with one another, like tomboys used to sharing the same bed at home, the same room at the theatre, to dressing, undressing, splashing about naked in the same bath-tub:

"Get up, Lily," said one of them, laughing and raising her sturdy little hand. "Get up, or. . . ."

"No," said Lily, "let me be: I'm dead."

As it happened, on the day before there had been a general tumble, six in a row; one of them, losing her balance, had dragged the others with her; and the lot had fallen flat in a tangle of steel and flesh. Bucking Horse, Old Jigger, Street Donkey—the nicknames they gave their bikes—had kicked them black and blue. They showed one another the bruises on their limbs—"Oh, don't it hurt, just!" "What about mine?" "Look here!"—like young recruits bragging of their wounds after the skirmish.

"Lily!"

"Yes, Ma!"

And Lily washed quickly, put on her frock and ran downstairs to make the coffee; but Ma stopped her on the way:

"Lily, you light the fire,"

"What about Maud?" said Lily. "Why can't Maud do it?"

"You young impudence!" said Ma. "Maud has gone to Jimmy's to take the bike which Tom couldn't get to him yesterday; his place was shut. It's the bike you spoilt, you little bedlamite!"

Lily had to laugh at the thought of Maud struggling with Old Jigger: Maud, who couldn't lead the machine by the handle-bar, or even walk beside it, without barking her shins.

"Why!" cried Lily. "She'll explain everything wrong to Jimmy; and the bike will be no use!"

"Well, then, go yourself," said Ma, after a pause. "And mind you come back quickly; don't go loitering in the street; and don't stay long with that drunkard."

"Yes, Ma."

Gresse Street, where Jimmy lived, was quite as dreary as Rathbone Place. Here and there, a few posters on the walls; a low-fronted shop or two, displaying sweets and candies, or else a dazzling case of oranges on the muddy pavement; alleys, stables, cab-yards. . . .

It was here that Jimmy had his workshop, or rather his tool-store, for he did not do much work there. The leisure which his occupation at the theatre left him he devoted to improving himself. Electricity and its manifold uses held his interest. There was no doubt that, had he given up all his time to it, he would have become very clever, for he had the inventor's brain and, moreover, possessed an astonishing manual skill for altering and perfecting things. He worked in copper and steel, was glad to make and repair bikes for a few customers, the New Zealanders among others. While working, he brewed all manner of plans in his brain. Every one of them revealed a practical intelligence: saddle-supports which reduced

the shaking on a bike, improved carriage-springs and so on ; and, on the stage, inventions to dispense with men in the flies and wings, to work everything—scenery, curtain, limelight—from the switchboard. . . .

Since joining the theatre, Jimmy had naturally undergone the influence of the stage. It had affected his ideas, with all its new-fangled “ turns,” which owed their success to a maximum of daring—or bluff—coupled with a minimum of scientific knowledge : illusionists basing their effects upon the reflections of invisible mirrors and the cunning use of combined lights ; “ looping the loop,” “ circles of death,” in which sheer weight did the cyclist’s work for him, his arrival at a given point depending upon his accelerated and calculated speed. From seeing so many of this sort scouring the world—erstwhile acrobats, former laboratory-students, who now, venturing all and risking all, topped the bills at the music-halls—Jimmy, greatly interested in this scientific side, had himself made researches in that direction. *Engineering* and other journals had printed some of his schemes, including that of an apparatus based upon the notion of exterior ballistics : the resistance of the air proportional to the square of the velocity, and, according to this velocity, the exact proportion of the angle of incidence to the angle of projection. In theory, it was perfect ; in practice there might be some unexpected hitch. It was necessary for the performer, who allowed himself to be projected by a series of powerful springs, to fall accurately from pedestal to pedestal, preserving a faultless balance ; in a word, to risk his life six times in as many seconds. The daring of a Laurence and the agility of a Lily combined would not have sufficed for the task ; and Jimmy had prudently contented himself with pinning his diagrams on the walls of the workshop and dismissed the idea from his mind. Not that he was afraid, not he, but simply because it appeared impossible to him.

Other plans had interested him, besides : flying-machines, for instance. He was a real enthusiast about flying-machines ! One day, perhaps, when he knew more . . . But the theatre did not leave him much leisure ; yet he managed, somehow, for he took but little sleep and the rest of the time he devoted to study. And this was the Jimmy of whom Ma made a bogey to Lily ; for he was one of the few men whom she saw often ; and you can never tell . . . with those devils of the stage . . . !

Meanwhile, Lily, as soon as she had turned the corner of the street, drew herself up and, with a light step, went down Percy Street and Tottenham Court Road, instead of keeping straight on. It took her five minutes longer, but it suggested luxury, fine shops, handsome furniture, patent-leather shoes. She adored shopping, though it was only with the eyes, through the plate-glass windows. She loved to pass in front of the Horse Shoe, where stars lived, real ones, not performing dogs. And then there was a hoarding covered with advertisements that interested her : the Hippodrome, the Kingdom, the Castle, displayed between extract of beef and mustard ; and there were always new programmes ; always new names ; and elephants, horses, lions ; and tights. . . .

Lily looked at this for a few seconds. And, suddenly, she felt a thrill . . . on a scarlet poster, dazzling as the sun, she read :

## THE KINGDOM.

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**TRAMPY WHEEL-PAD !!!**

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**GREAT SUCCESS!!**

Trampy in London !

Not that Lily was astonished : it seemed to her quite simple that he should be there, as simple as for her to be in Chicago, Bombay or Cape Town ; people do sometimes meet on tour—it all depends : you can be separated for years and then perform at the same theatre for months. No, she was not in the least astonished : a little excited, that was all, without exactly knowing why. . . .

“ But, if I should meet him,” she thought, “ what shall I say to him ? What will he say to me ? Will he think me grown prettier or uglier ? ”

Lily came to herself again and continued on her errand ; crossed Tottenham Court Road ; plunged into a labyrinth of blocked alleys, of dark courts ; and, suddenly, was at Jimmy’s.

Lily did not like him much ; she considered him good-looking, for a man, but too shy. He never paid her a compliment. He seemed to think her ugly, whereas many others admired her and made no bones about telling her so, especially during the last few months ; but he was ashamed of himself, no doubt : a drunkard, as Ma said. . . .

Poor Lily had no luck. She would have been so happy to be courted, to relieve her boredom. But nothing disgusted her so much as drink. And yet it didn’t show in Jimmy. He always walked straight, never fell, like that head-balancer who, the other night, had come tumbling down from his perch. Besides, that one had an excuse : he drank because he was crossed in love ; to forget, they said. Lily forgave everything the moment there was love in it ; but an icicle like Jimmy, who loved nobody and who drank for the sake of drinking . . . ugh !

Jimmy was at work when Lily entered. The small, dark shop, crammed with things in steel, with loose wheels, queer-shaped objects, reminded Lily of a property store, only it was dirtier. There were tools everywhere ; designs for machinery pinned on the walls ; it was all very ugly.

And Jimmy's greeting was none too engaging either. A curt smile—"Glad to see you, Miss Lily"—and, as for the bike, he hadn't understood a word of what the one-eyed creature who had just left had tried to say.

"I thought as much," said Lily, laughing. "That's why I came."

And, in a few words, she explained what she wanted. First mend the twisted frame; next, a slight alteration for a new trick; a step here, another there.

"Still more fresh tricks, Lily?"

"New ones every day, Jimmy. No end of bruises, I tell you!"

"It's part of the game," said Jimmy.

"I should like to see you try it," retorted Lily, contemptuously, "squeezing through the frame while it's going, with the pedal barking your back;" and she rubbed herself as she spoke. "Only yesterday I got a kick: gee! It's like those new tricks in which I don't feel safe: riding with one foot on the saddle and the other on the bar, playing the banjo; it makes me shiver as I go past the footlights . . . and, if I lose my balance, I'm sure to get black and blue somewhere!"

"Pooh!" said Jimmy. "One can't expect a white skin at the game."

Lily didn't care for this. If she couldn't be courted, at least she liked to be pitied: that flattered her pride. . . . It was all very well for Pa to say, "It's part of the game, my little lady." But that josser of a Jimmy, talking like that at his ease . . . !

"I'm glad I'm not your daughter!" she said. "My! You'd be harder than Pa."

"Your Pa is hard, sometimes; but he's very fond of you."

"Of course," said Lily, "he wouldn't like me to break my neck; I bring him in too much for that, eh?"



"Come," said Jimmy, "don't talk nonsense. It's not right to speak as you're doing. You'll be sorry for it, I'm sure. Tell me: you were saying you wanted a step here, another there; do you mean like this?"

And he rummaged among his tools, hunted about for loose pieces, showed them to Lily, while thinking of other things:

"Look here," he went on, "do you think you're the only one that's got to work? Suppose you were shut up all day in a factory? Have you ever been to a factory? Do you know the life of a metal-buffer girl at Sheffield, standing in front of her wheel from morning till night, and work, work, work . . .?"

"But I'm not a work-girl, you great silly! You know I'm an artiste! And, now, shall I tell you what I think of you, Jimmy?" said Lily, pouting. "You're a bad man, that's what you are!"

And thereupon she put out her tongue, turned her back on him and began to look at the walls, the diagrams, the drawings, an illustration out of *Engineering*.

There was a pause.

Jimmy, while handling the bike, gazed at Lily. There was no sentimentality about Jimmy, but his lively imagination made him see things through and through; and, whatever he might be, Jimmy was not bad. That little Lily: to think that, among all the girls of her age, she was the only one to do that trick! He pitied her and all child-prodigies. To his mind, there was something unsportsmanlike about it: something like a race won by a yearling, with jockey, whip and spurs. He did not believe; all he heard, of course. He knew—he lived with them, he was one of them—he knew the peculiar mania of the music-hall, the instinctive lie, uttered as if to discourage competition by giving it a fright at the start. To listen to them, it meant "going through the

mill " all the time, the horsewhip, the belt, all day long. Among the people with the painted faces, it was a shot at martyrdom, a chance for professional boasting. The most commonplace, the most coddled lives were made more interesting by imaginary wounds and scars, like those explorers, in the books, who cross Africa without food or drink, barefooted, with a crocodile snapping at their heels.

He took good care not to exaggerate. Life in the halls was no worse than life elsewhere, thank God ! It had its good side and its bad side and its professional risks. The " pros," taking them all round, were as good as the " jossers." He wanted to be just. He had seen many who were very happy ; one could get anything done by firm kindness. He could also understand, in the terrible struggle for bread, that a man went on toiling hard in the trade in which he was born. A " pro " could not make a blue-stocking of his daughter ; some were born duchesses on satin ; others artistes on the boards. One trade was as good as another ; but dangerous practisings, bruised flesh, seamed skins : no, he didn't approve of that. He had seen the Laurences, mad with ambition, beginning all over again, in spite of falls heavy enough to stave in the stage ; had seen girls who " do knots " lying in the dressing-rooms, gasping, exhausted. Even when professional vanity alone prompted such excesses, Jimmy protested within himself ; and then there were so many abuses. . . . Besides, the stage so often spoiled a woman : every branch of the stage, from the highest to the lowest. All that coaxing familiarity ! What he said was, if Lily had been his daughter, she should not be on the stage ; but there she was and he couldn't help it ; and, as it was her natural place to be there, he would not be guilty of the meanness of disgusting a poor girl with the profession which she had been at pains to learn. He preferred to

let her call him "a bad man." And that required a certain courage; for it was no longer a child talking to him, but a girl and an exquisitely pretty girl! Jimmy could not believe his eyes. What a change! Was it possible? Having been away from London, on Kellermann's service, he had not seen her for many months, except the day before, just time to shake hands behind the scenes, in the dusk; but here, in his shop, he hardly recognized her, he could not exactly say why. One thing was certain: he had left her a child and he now found her a beautiful girl.

"Rot!" he said to himself. "She's a child for all that. Only, if she keeps on like this, what a handsome woman she will be!"

That familiarity on the stage: he reproached himself for thinking of it; it seemed an insult to Lily. And he began to talk to her of different things, kindly and pleasantly, changing from subject to subject. He explained his drawings on the wall, his ideas: exterior ballistics; the resistance of the air; risking your life six times in as many seconds. . . .

"He's drunk," thought Lily.

And, to stop this flow of words, Lily, as though talking to herself, said she did not complain: no, she would quite like the bike, if she hadn't to practise so hard; she only complained that they didn't treat her "fair" at home:

"And look how I'm dressed! I've had the same toque two years. And what do you think of this frock? The stuff cost four-three a yard. I look like a tenter."

Jimmy did not share Lily's indignation. He thought her neatly and nicely dressed, in spite of her performing-dog's toque, as she said. It all suited her so well. But, when he saw that clear-cut little face lifted up to him with a rebellious air, he felt that the fatigue, that even

the blows didn't count ; that the hardest thing, for Lily, was to be " badly dressed ; " that she would never swallow that.

" But, look here," said Jimmy, " all this isn't worth making a fuss for ; you get cross about nothing at all ; when you came, you were all smiles ; and now . . . "

" That's because," Lily began, with a sly laugh—oh, she was simply exasperated with Jimmy's coldness : she'd show him, the icicle, and have a bit of fun with him ! —" on my way here, Jimmy, I met . . . now you won't give me away, Jimmy ? . . . I met my . . . sweetheart."

" A sweetheart ? You ? Lily ? "

" Yes, yes, yes," said Lily, nodding her head and looking at him archly, for she could see, by Jimmy's expression, that he was caught.

" And your father and mother know nothing about it ? " insisted Jimmy, nonplussed.

" No, no ; it doesn't concern them : at my age, a girl earns a living for her Pa and Ma ; I have as much right to a sweetheart as any one else, I suppose."

And, greatly amused, she fixed Jimmy with her mocking eyes.

Jimmy stared at her in amazement.

Then she understood that it was not a thing to joke about and that what she had just said was terrible. And, suddenly :

" No, it's not true, Jimmy ! I was only laughing ! Oh, Jimmy, you're going to give me away !" cried Lily, squeezing Jimmy's arm with a convulsive little hand. " Oh, Jimmy, don't tell Ma . . . please, please, Jimmy ! "

And there was something so sincere in her voice that Jimmy saw that she was speaking the truth, that it was only the jest of a flapper used to the manners of the stage.

" No," he said briskly, " I shan't tell ; don't be afraid, Lily ; only . . . "

"Ah, that's nice of you!" said Lily, much relieved. "Marriage indeed! Why, what would become of the troupe? I shall never marry, I think. . . ."

"Still, it's bound to come, some day," said Jimmy, interrupting her. "You won't spend all your life on a bike. You're sure to marry, some day. . . ."

"Don't talk to me about marriage! No, not that. Gee!"

"But . . ."

"Love-stories! With men! I! And you believed it," said Lily, drawing back her shoulder and raising her hand. "I could smack you, you great silly!" And, all of a sudden, "I must go," she cried, "I've stayed too long; Ma will be waiting for me with her broom!"

And Lily rushed outside, without giving Jimmy time to answer. He could just see her turn the corner of the street.

Jimmy went back to his work, silently, wrapped up in his thoughts. That dear little Lily! She could be easy in her mind. No, he would never be a cause of worry to her. . . .

Meanwhile, Lily ran home as fast as she could and, on entering, saw that it was no use; her Ma was waiting for her, furious:

"Where have you been?"

"Why, I've come straight from Jimmy's, Ma!"

"That's a lie! The butcher's boy, who has just left, saw you outside the Horse Shoe. Who were you waiting for, you young gadabout?"

"I wasn't waiting for any one!" cried Lily, her eyes blazing with anger.

"You devil!" said Ma, looking round for a stick, an umbrella, anything. . . .

And, when she saw nothing within reach, her anger

increased. Then she stiffened her arm and made for Lily, who sprang behind the table. . . . But Ma, tripping on the carpet, fell at full length, dragging down with her the table-cloth and two cups that were on it :

" My two china cups ! You viper ! " she yelled. . . .

At that moment, the door opened ; Clifton entered. He seemed preoccupied ; looked at his watch :

" Nine o'clock. We ought to be at the theatre ! Where are the girls ? And what . . . what's all this ? " he asked, seeing the disorder, Mrs. Clifton scrambling up from the floor, Lily scowling in a corner.

Ma grunted an explanation. Two cups broken, Lily a gadabout who would bring them to the grave with shame !

" But, Pa, I was only looking at the posters."

" Posters ? " repeated Clifton. " What posters ? What's all this nonsense ? "

And, when Ma had told him, interrupted by despairing " But, Pas," and " No, Pas," from Lily, he very calmly asked, was he going to have peace in his own house, or was he not ? All this fuss about two broken cups ; beating Lily for nothing !

Never, in any circumstances, would Clifton have snubbed Mrs. Clifton like this before Lily. He would have waited until she had gone. But to come upon all this rot when there were so many serious things to discuss ! The Sisters Pawnee, whom he had seen last night : Polly, Edith, Lillian. Yes, that Lillian, damn it, a winged rose ! And the things they did on their bike, without seeming to touch it !

" My poor Lily," Pa went on, going up to his daughter and stroking her hair. " I'm not saying it to vex you ; but you're not in it with the Pawnees ! Come along ! Beg your Ma's pardon ; and let's be off to the theatre. I'm in great form this morning. We shall have a grand practice."

### III

A FEW minutes later, Pa was hustling his herd before him :

“ Quicker, my Woolly-legs ! No time to lose ! ”

He thought of the tricks which he had jotted down, the night before, in his note-book. Lily would pick them up soon enough : she was as clever as the Pawnees, when all was said, only less graceful. She had the balancing power all right ; but grace, grace, damn it, to do a thing like that as though it were child's play : that's what she lacked ! You saw the effort. And the apprentices had no precision in their groupings. Now the fat freaks had. To combine German discipline with English grace, that was the question ; to have the troupe of troupes ; to have a Lily who would be worth more by herself than Polly, Edith and Lillian put together. But that meant work and going through the mill ! This last made Pa think of the old sheep and their bleatings. He gave a nervous little laugh ; and his hand had a convulsive movement, as though to strangle those pests.

Pa had recovered his good humour and was grinning by the time they reached the theatre. Merely by his way of taking the key of his dressing-room from the stage-doorkeeper one recognized the owner of a troupe, the man with a “ permanent address,” the manager, the boss, the prof, the Pa. On entering the lobby, he, with his six girls, took possession of the theatre. He nodded to the staff ; growled a “ Lazybones ! ” as the Roofers passed

out two by two, always two by two : a fair one with made-up eyes, a dark one with kiss-me-quick lips ; sniffed their cheap perfumes amid the tarry smell of the packing-cases marked Sydney, New York, Paris. . . .

On reaching the stage, Pa first gave a glance to make sure that there were no elephants, or ponies, or Merry Wives ; that they could practise at their ease, without having to burrow in a corner, like rats. The stage was almost empty. After the live street, it was a pallid and ghostly light. The New Zealanders, it need not be said, no longer fancied themselves in the cavern of Bluebeard or Puss-in-Boots : they had seen too many stages during the past two years. The slant of the floor, the roughness or smoothness of the boards was what interested them, in their dread of falls and barked shins. Pa hurried them to their dressing-room to get into their knickers, while he took off his jacket and turned up his trousers, so as to run better. No more time to lose with his Lily ! He was still in a fever from seeing those Pawnees last night. As for the stage and the boards, a lot he cared, slanting or straight, rough or smooth ! To work ! To work !! To work !!! . . . And he got ready the bikes, which Tom had brought down, without a glance around him.

To a poet, to a painter, that glance would have been worth the taking. The iron curtain was raised, the house loomed vaguely ; the balconies, covered with cloth, stood out like cliffs ; the pit, with its seats under a grey drugget, against the dust, lifted towards the stage its rows of motionless waves. The stage itself was strange : a sort of huge cave, with strips of scenery hanging like stalactites ; near the wall, a metal pedestal, with a red velvet platform, looked like a blood-stained scaffold ; one suspected the presence of properties : wheels, iron implements, tangled ropes, like so many instruments of torture. At the New



Zealanders' feet, half-naked bodies, suggesting the souls of the damned, were tumbling, practising falls ; a woman in a white wrap hovered round ; and, near the proscenium, a pack of trained seals, lying in their moist boxes, raised their frightened heads, as who should say corpses cast on the shores of hell by the silent waves of the pit.

But three slender forms, spinning on their trapeze almost above Pa's head, sprang lightly to the stage, near an old fellow in spectacles. . . .

"Why, Mr. Fuchs and the Three Graces ! Here's a surprise !" said Pa, who had not seen them since the New York Olympians. "When did you get here ? Yesterday ?"

There was a general shaking of hands. Fuchs congratulated Pa on his success, had followed his progress in the papers. . . . Pa owned a troupe now and had a name. . . .

"So this is your Lily," said Fuchs, tapping her on the cheek as she joined the group. "A real lady ! And a good girl, is she ?"

The Three Graces also congratulated Pa, kissed Lily :

"How sweet you've grown ! Why, Lily, how pretty you are !"

Lily was so surprised, so pleased ; and her Pa was very proud. He thanked Mr. Fuchs, complimented the Three Graces in his turn, to their delight :

"What arms ! What muscles !" Then, "Excuse us, eh ? Lily must get ready. We shall meet again presently, after practice."

The Graces had gone back to it already. Pa tested the bikes ; took a hurried turn at the pumps ; and, when the apprentices and Lily returned :

"Yoop ! Up with you !"

The round began. Tom looked to the girls, constantly ; ran after them ; kept an eye on their falls. Pa, constantly,

hung on to Lily. Nothing else existed for him, when he was handling his star. His wish to do well, his love of art for art's sake worked him up, stimulated him, made him hit out, but not in anger: it was the spark of enthusiasm, of which the apprentices caught the reflection.

"Hi, you there, Mary, I'll pull your ear! Birdie, if I take my belt to you! . . ."

But his Lily above all; his Lily; his seven stone of flesh and bones! Pa was an artiste; he had thought of a thousand things since his trip to Brighton. New and astounding tricks; and easy ones at that . . . if Lily only would! Oh, he'd soon make her graceful! But, for that, she would have to obey, to let go the handle-bar at a sign, instead of endlessly seeking her balance. For instance, Pa held her rein to prevent falls—there was nothing spiteful about Pa, he never let you fall on purpose—and Lily—"One! Two! Count together, Lily!"—put one foot on the saddle, the other on the handle-bar: "Three!" That's where she had to let go her hands, smartly, and stand erect as she rode. The machine slipped under her. Lily, shaking with fear, stooped to seize the handle-bar.

"Stand up, Lily! Show pluck, Lily!" said Pa.

Lily, accustomed to obeying blindly, drew herself up again. But, sometimes—crash!—the whole came tumbling down. Notwithstanding the rein, Lily fell to the ground; and the bike, in addition, caught her a kick in passing.

"Nothing broken? A tiny scratch; it's nothing. Tom, the white stuff!"

Tom left his Woolly-legs, brought a bottle of embrocation; a few drops of that on the skin, a bit of sticking-plaster: there, that was all right!

"You see, Lily, you're not dead yet! Nothing to be frightened about. Come, try again!"

The great thing was to hustle. Pa displayed so much

enthusiasm—"Those Pawnees, damn it!"—that Lily, for all her fears, was smitten in her turn, ended by becoming exasperated against those Pawnees, felt a longing to wring their necks, damn it!

She obeyed her Pa like an automaton, in her anxiety to do well.

"More graceful! That's it! Not so stiff!" said Pa.

"But, Pa, I can't!" protested Lily, soaked in perspiration.

"But you've got to, my little lady!"

They passed from one practice to another, almost without resting. Lily was worn out, Pa seemed indefatigable.

Sometimes, practising was marked by interruptions. Maud's gouged eye remained the typical accident. Another time, a girl lay fainting for ten minutes, after falling on her head; or else the stage was invaded by a ballet. There was no end to it. On this particular day, they had a visit from Kellermann himself, Kellermann the chief and master, who came along with Jimmy; a visit which was the more sensational for being quite rare. Pa, now that he was the owner of a troupe and sure of his position, would not have been sorry to be noticed by Kellermann, just to impress Mr. Fuchs and show him what they thought of Lily in London.

"Do your best, my Lily," said Pa. "'He's' watching us."

But bill-toppers, New Zealanders though they might be, were nobodies to "him." Lily was one of a thousand, among all those of both sexes who performed in his theatres. There might have been ten cycling rhinoceroses on the boards; he might have seen Lily swallow her bike and change into a butterfly: he would have paid no attention. Those were details that concerned the stage-manager. He hurried across the stage to the fly-ladder, made Jimmy

explain things, took notes as he went, wanted to see for himself, pointed to the great batten, to the electric switches:

"How much for so many lamps? And that? What does that come to, roughly?"

And he stopped for a second in his course, his ear stretched towards Jimmy to catch his answer flying; then both of them went on again, quickly.

Jimmy was now following Kellermann along the bridges, with the whole stage below him, in the ruddy semi-darkness; at one side, the half-naked bodies fell with a heavy thud after their somersaults; or else it was the sharp sound of a bike skidding; and distant voices rose up to him:

"But, Pa, I can't!"

"But you've got to, my little lady!"

"Poor little thing!" thought Jimmy, disappearing in the flies, towards the side-rails, at Kellermann's heels.

And Lily went on riding and Pa running after her, round and round and round. She seemed to be fleeing madly, pursued by a devil. Suddenly, Pa stopped, having exhausted his strength, and Lily fell rather than sat upon a hamper by the wall.

"Here, Lily, put this over your shoulders," said Pa, giving her his jacket. "You'll catch cold, darling. Oof! Let's take breath a bit!"

But a glad voice burst through the silence: it came from the Three Graces, who always worked on stubbornly, even in the absence of Nunkie, who had been out for a smoke. Thea greeted his return with a cry of triumph:

"Ten pullings-up with one arm, Nunkie! Ten without stopping!"

"Well done! I'm very pleased with you," said Mr. Fuchs.

And he crowned their excitement by declaring that, as a reward, he would, that very day, buy Thea the sleeve-links which he had promised her ever since last year.

“ Dear Nunkie ! ”

A spasm of vanity made them rush back to their work ; and soon the three of them formed, in mid-air, an involved group of ropes, bars and hardened limbs.

Lily, in spite of her fatigue, was amused at those mad girls. To take all that trouble for the sake of a pair of sleeve-links ! Her shoulders shook with nervous laughter, in spite of Pa's presence. He quieted her with a gesture, scolded her under his breath, kindly :

“ Shut up, Lily ! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Lily ? ”

And he looked at Nunkie with an air of saying :

“ You old rogue ! ”

As for the Three Graces, it was a pleasure to watch them : their pluck was infectious.

“ To work ! ” said Pa. “ Let's have a somersault, eh ? ”

And, at a sign from him, two of the apprentices, assisted by Tom, fixed a little steel-legged table in the middle of the stage, bore down upon it with all their weight. The bike, set at full speed, stopped short as it struck the table ; and Lily, carried on by the impulse, continued her whirl, full on her back, and, carrying the machine with her, came to the ground on the other side of the table and went on riding. But that shook her, in her stomach, her heart, everywhere. Each time, she was nearly succeeding, but it wasn't quite right.

“ I can see,” said Pa, “ you want to make me lose my temper ! ”

“ But, Pa, it hurts ! ”

“ Oh, those blasted little brats ! ” shouted Pa. “ Rickety machines, every one of them : no more energy than a sparrow ; and lazy into the bargain ! ”

Then, suddenly, Lily succeeded magnificently.

“ You see you can do it when you like, you obstinate little wretch ! ” said Pa. “ Now try not to miss it again,

next time! That will do for to-day," he added, seeing Lily out of breath. "Go and get dressed, my Lily."

The Three Graces were finishing also. Good old Nunkie wiped the perspiration from their foreheads with his big checked handkerchief, invited Clifton to come with Lily and choose the sleeve-links and suggested that they could have a chat at the restaurant. . . .

"Would you like to, Lily?"

"Yes, Pa."

"Very well, then."

The girls would go back alone. Tom, after carrying up the bikes, was told to run home and fetch Miss Lily's new dress and boots, Mrs. Clifton's brooch and big hat. And, half an hour later, Lily, who had crawled up to her dressing-room stiff-legged, exhausted, feeling sixty, came tripping down the stairs all freshly attired, wearing her mother's great hat and a pair of creaking boots. She soon recovered when she was dressed out. She drew up her dainty figure, so as to be level with the imposing group of Pa, Nunkie and the Three Graces.

Lily, very proud of herself, spun out the pleasure of drawing on her gloves to go shopping with those big girls, who had had love-stories. Then they discussed what restaurant. . . . Nunkie, long ago—"Zæo's year at the Aquarium: that doesn't make me any younger, eh?"—had discovered a little German place. . . .

Lily would have liked to propose the Horse Shoe, to walk in there, with her big hat and creaking boots, as though the place belonged to her. But they decided upon a "Lyons" in Wardour Street. At the table, it was touching to watch the attentions which the Three Graces lavished upon their Nunkie, the respect they showed him. Pa was not sorry that Lily should see that, but Lily took no notice at all: she just removed her gloves, held her knife and fork with the tips of her fingers, let Pa help her,

thanked him with a pretty "'K you." From the corner of her eye, she watched other groups, to pick up good manners. She seemed to have frequented smart restaurants all her life : beside her, Nunkie and the Three Graces, who cut their bread with their knives and made a noise when eating, looked like a family of small farmers on a visit to London town. Pa was greatly amused, enjoyed his daughter's aristocratic ways, admired her refined air. When they went out, in obedience to a look from Lily, he bought her a bunch of violets, which he pinned to her bodice himself :

"Well, Lily, are you happy ? Do you love your Pa ? Tell me you love your Pa."

And he looked at her gently, as if in regret at having been so harsh at practice.

"It's for your good, my Lily, you'll thank me one of these days. I'll give you lovely dresses, I'll cover you with diamonds !"

"Why not to-day ?" asked Lily, with a comic pout.

Then both of them laughed and Lily forgot everything, even the blow with the fist, at being treated like a lady.

"If I was married," she said to the Three Graces, "I should like to go shopping all day long and have fine dresses, a gold watch and no bike !"

The Three Graces, with their heroic strength, had no thought of such luxuries. Thea told Lily of her successes in America :

"Five pullings-up with one arm at Boston. Six at 'Frisco. Eight when we got back to New York ! Eight, Lily ! And to-day . . ."

"And your lover in America . . . tell me about your lover . . ." interrupted Lily, pressing Thea's arm.

"Talk low," said Thea, looking back at Nunkie, who was walking behind with Pa. "Nunkie is furious with him. If ever he meets him. . . ! He says it's disgrace-

ful, his not writing to me, after asking leave to. It's an insult that ought to disgust me with men for good and all, Nunkie says."

She told Lily everything, her unhappiness at first, for she loved him. Lily, with her little nose in the air, sniffed those love stories, gulped them down, so to speak, with an instinctive movement of the lips :

"And did you write to him?"

"I wrote to him, but he never answered. Oh, if Nunkie knew! He forbids us to write, because writing, you know, Lily, puts out the muscles of the arms, interferes with the pullings-up, Nunkie says. . . ."

But they turned into Regent Street: to Lily it was the entrance to the shopper's paradise. The huge curve displayed its window-fronts; and looking into them were ladies and gentlemen and little girls: not dressed in their Mas' leavings, these last, but belonging to a superior branch of mankind, similar to that in the front boxes.

Nunkie blinked his eyes behind his spectacles: all this luxury terrified him; he had almost forgotten his sleeve-links, talking with Clifton of people they had known:

"The boy-violinist? Not up to much. . . . Ave Maria? A disgrace: married, deserted, I don't know what. . . . Poland, the Parisienne? A scandal!"

As for him, he had but one wish, after getting his girls married: to retire to his home, grow his roses, look after his pigeons; simple joys, the only ones. . . .

"Look, Thea!" Lily broke in, pointing through the plate-glass to a heap of imitation jewellery lying, among watches, on red and black velvet.

"Come on!" said Mr. Fuchs, with a sigh.

But, when Thea saw the prices—ten shillings, twelve shillings—she refused to go in, saying she could get them just as pretty in Wardour Street and ever so much cheaper.



"Just as you please, my darling. I'll do whatever you like. I don't know anything about it!"

Clifton felt something rise in revolt within him; he could not resist showing that old curmudgeon what a Pa was and that his little girl, too, did pullings-up in her way and that he knew how to treat her as a Pa should:

"Your watch, Lily," he said, opening the door and pushing her in. "Now's your chance. Come, choose for yourself!"

"Oh, Pa! Do you really mean it, Pa?" she said, incredulously.

"Now look here, I'll smack you, Lily! When your Pa says a thing . . .!"

Lily seemed a princess, with her way of saying, "'K you," of touching the ornaments, the watches, like a little creature thirsting for luxury and yielding to her inclination at the first opportunity. There was so great a look of happiness in her eyes and Clifton was so proud of his Lily that he offered to give her a chain as well, to go with the watch. Lily refused at first, for form's sake, and then took courage—like a poor little martyr who did not like to disoblige her Pa—and chose a very pretty watch-chain, to the great wonderment of the Three Graces and of Nunkie, who thought, as they left the shop, that the children of to-day . . . upon his word . . . the parents of to-day . . . it was all very different in his time. . . .

Clifton laughed to himself at the old curmudgeon, as he left him and went home, with his star. Lily hung heavily on her father's arm, passed the drapers' shops with a serious air.

"No, another time!" said Pa, who felt what she was after.

And he hurried his daughter off, for he might have yielded, she was so nice.

Lily set her watch in Piccadilly, as they passed: then at

the Café de l'Europe, by the big clock at the back ; and again, twenty steps farther, at the bar of the Crown. Lily looked at the time and Pa showed his Lily off. He was proud to be seen with her in the neighbourhood of Lisle Street, where everybody knew him. True, he had the name of being hard with Lily. But, come, was he hard ? Did she look like a martyr ? Preposterous, all those stories. And he redoubled his attentions to his daughter, who talked a heap of nonsense, asked funny questions :

“ Why should writing a letter interfere with the trapeze, when a girl has arms harder than a horse's hocks ? ”

“ What ? What ? ” asked Pa, taken aback.

When he understood, he would have held his sides for laughing, if he had only been at home :

“ Oh, the old rogue ! ” he said admiringly. “ He loves his dear girls, does Nunkie ! ”

He was still laughing, when they reached Tottenham Court Road ; and, as they passed the Horse Shoe, a voice, which Lily seemed to know, called to them from behind :

“ Hullo, Clifton ! ”

Pa turned his head in surprise :

“ Hullo, Trampy ! ”

For he recognized him at once, though Trampy was very much changed. Besides, he knew him to be in London. But it was a prosperous and gorgeous Trampy, quite unlike the Trampy of the old days ; and forthwith Trampy explained : champagne-supper last' night ; just come from the bar ; glass of Vichy-water, you know ! Huge success in London ! Girls, by Jove ! And then, pretending not to know Lily :

“ I congratulate you, Clifton ; what a dear little wife ! ”

Pa, greatly amused, protested : not his wife, no, his Lily ! Then Trampy went into ecstasies : how pretty she had grown, one of the handsomest girls in London, sure ! And in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland !

And in all the British Dominions beyond the seas, by Jove! And what a change since Mexico! She was a woman now, a peach, a regular peach!

Lily seemed fascinated by Trampy, stared at his shiny hat, his gold rings, his patent-leather shoes. A swell, Trampy, a toff, a gentleman like those in the front boxes!

"Yes, Lily," said Trampy, guessing her thoughts, "yes, that's the way it is; one's not always hard up. I've struck oil since leaving America. Heaps of money! Eh, what?" he continued, offering Clifton an expensive cigar. "You wouldn't have thought it, would you, when you left me stranded in Mexico? That was a nice dirty trick you played me! Come and have a drain, old man, to drink Miss Lily's health and show there's no ill feeling!"

"No, another time," said Clifton, vexed at this recollection of Mexico, now that he was the established owner of a troupe, a man whose word was as good as gold. "I'm in a hurry to get home: a very nice home, Trampy, a real good one. Come and see us some day. *Au revoir*."

But Trampy was so pleased at meeting them, he never stopped shaking them by the hand. Lily had to accept a bag of cakes to share with the troupe when they had their tea. Then, at last:

"*Au revoir*, old man; *au revoir*, my love, my little peach!"

Lily's head was quite turned by this jolly day: it made her forget six months of worries. To think that, for some people, every day was like that! However, she mustn't complain: a watch, a chain as well, the somersault pulled off, compliments from Trampy. . . .

Ma's reception of them, when they got home, was icy. Pa looked a little like a school-boy caught at fault; and Lily, none too easy in her mind, put the cakes on the side-board and hastened to take off her mother's big hat. Ma grumbled, under her breath: it was nothing but going

out, now. Old Cinderella could stay at home, bare-headed, while my lady went shopping! A fine thing, my word, for a great sensible girl to abuse her Pa's weakness! There was nothing to do at home, of course! Well, if it pleased Mr. Clifton, she had no more to say! . . . And, while she grumbled, Ma made the tea and shot glances at Lily, a Lily with red cheeks and bright eyes and looking so pretty that Ma, full of mixed pride and anxiety, felt sudden longings to eat her up with kisses, "ugly" that she was!

Pa did his best to calm Mrs. Clifton, tried to amuse her with the story of the sleeve-links, of the horse's hocks, and Pa laughed, my!

"He laughs best who laughs last," growled Ma.

"Just think, Ma," said Lily, taking courage from Pa's merriment. "That old rogue forbids his daughter to write, he pretends that . . ."

"And quite right too!" said Ma. "What do girls want with writing? And who do you mean? What old rogue? You don't mean Mr. Fuchs, I suppose?"

"Why, yes, Ma, old Fuchs."

"Old Fuchs! . . . You chit, to talk like that of respectable people! Go to your room, impudence! Dry bread for you!"

"But, Ma . . .!" said Lily rebelliously.

"That's what comes of it," said Mrs. Clifton, addressing her husband, "when a mother no longer has the right to correct her daughter."

And she pointed to Lily, who persisted in remaining, who was even beginning an explanation:

"But, Pa . . . but. . . ."

"Obey your mother first," said Clifton.

"Yes, Pa."

And Lily went out, very anxious at the turn which things had taken.

Clifton realized that perhaps he had been wrong, that

morning, to blame Mrs. Clifton in Lily's presence. He was wrong also to laugh at old Fuchs before Lily. But, all the same, that old rogue . . . and they had believed it, those Graces ! That wouldn't go down with Lily !

"It's an example you ought to follow, instead of laughing at it, Mr. Clifton !"

"Upon my word, I'm very proud of my Lily ; she works well, she really does," said Pa, stretching himself in the easy-chair. "I'm pleased with her ; you know as well as I do, a girl is not a boy. She can do with a little spoiling. And only just now I made Lily a present of a gold watch and chain."

"Then I give up !" said Ma, in a voice of exasperation. "Then I give up ! Why should I take all this trouble bringing up your daughter ? A little spendthrift who will bring us all to the workhouse ! And a good thing when she does !"

But Pa wanted peace in his own house. That was enough of it ! Peace was what he wanted, damn it, and not a monkey-and-parrot life !

And, jumping up from his chair, he opened the door and shouted up the staircase :

"Come down, my Lily ! Your Ma says you may ! The cakes are on the table."

#### IV

PA would have covered his Lily with diamonds, if he had had the money . . . and if Ma had allowed it ! But, on this special point, she ventured to oppose him. She had been Lily's age herself, had Ma, and she enlarged upon the necessity of keeping a tight rein on Lily. Ma reckoned up the fugitives : Ave Maria and this one and that one and ever so many others who had bolted ; and troupes ruined by the flight—or the marriage—of the star.

"Lily has changed a good deal lately, dear. Are you sure she hasn't a man in her mind ?"

"There we go again !" said Pa. "Always the same old story ! But just tell me, who does she see ? Who does she know ? Jimmy ? You don't mean him, I suppose ? Very well ! Trampy, then ? A married man, divorced, married again, goodness knows what ! . . . And then . . . and then . . . Oh, well, let's have peace at home, at any rate ! Damn it, Lily may be a bit of a flirt : why shouldn't she, a pretty girl like that ? Beauty, in the profession, is half the battle."

And Pa entered into details, comforted Ma with good news : a fresh contract signed with Bill and Boom ; after that, the Kellermann tour : big salaries now. . . .

"No, dear, this isn't the time to worry Lily about trifles. And I don't want her bothered with useless work, either."

"Call house-work useless ! A woman's greatest charm !" exclaimed Ma.

Lily was a subject of friendly discussion to them. Both

adored her equally : both were proud of her at heart. For Lily was growing very beautiful ; everybody said so at the theatre : the stage-manager ; the acting-manager ; down to Jimmy, who stammered things. It was an endless series of compliments ; Kellermann's friend, the architect, who had not seen her for a long time, fell into raptures when he met her on the stage :

"Magneeficent !" he exclaimed, in his Franco-Belgian accent. "How old is she : sixteen ? Seventeen ?"

"Fourteen," said Ma, with a mincing air, for to that damned "parley-voo" she was as anxious to make Lily out a child now, in order to keep a firmer hold of her, as she had been to increase her age in America, so as to make her work.

"What, fourteen, Ma !" protested Lily.

"Yes, fourteen, of course ; do you think you know better than your mother, you little fool ? Can't you see that everybody's laughing at you ?"

Ma dreaded those irresponsible jossers, who filled Lily's head with a pack of false notions, and she kept a good watch, in her growing anxiety.

Ma, in the early days of their arrival in London, had been terribly obsessed by the dread of being left without means in the huge city. Lily had got them out of that difficulty. And now she was earning such a lot of money : one day, who knows, they would have made enough to assure their independence for good and all ! When she thought of this possibility, Ma's eyes lit up with yellow gleams ; she felt like catching hold of Lily and locking her up in a safe.

Pa was less eager for gain, less ant-like in his economies ; he was an artiste, above all ; he knew how to make allowances ; there was a time for work and a time for play. He often treated himself to the pleasure of taking Lily out ; and, each time, as usual, she got a nice little present. He

liked to pass for a Pa who spoilt his daughter, loved to hear himself so described and took a wicked delight in repeating it all to Mrs. Clifton.

Lily was the gainer by the difference in opinion ; she felt herself a little freer. When she went out in the morning, she considered herself at liberty to walk less fast and no longer trembled on returning. She loved to loiter in the Tottenham Court Road ; her little person assumed an air of importance ; if, after practice, some artiste passed her in the street and gave her a smile, she believed that he was waiting for her ; a " comic quartette," the Out-of-Tune Musicals, happening to come out of a bar and blow a kiss to her, were there on her account, she thought : four lovers at a swoop !

It was almost impossible that she should not meet Trampy, who was always prowling about from bar to bar, between Oxford Street and Leicester Square. She did meet him, in fact. Trampy, that day, wore a felt hat, a blue suit, a red tie, with a sixpenny Murias cocked in the corner of his mouth ; and he greeted her with a triumphant " Hullo, peach ! " as she passed. Lily was quite excited, stopped just long enough to refuse a drink and then left him very quickly. She was afraid it showed on her face, when she got home, and his words still rang in her ears, that she was awfully pretty, the prettiest girl on the stage, a peach, a duck, a pearl, a daisy, a bird !

All that she had seen and heard in her jostled existence now came back to her, grew and sprouted in her. Now that Lily was being made love to by gentlemen—not the monkey-faces or the blue-chins, but men like Trampy—her craving for admiration oozed out of her at every pore. . . .

Trampy ! Lily did not care for Trampy. But she thought him amiable, polite with the girls. She was grateful to him for being there to say pretty things to her



when she passed. She preferred that type to men like Jimmy, for instance, savages who always seemed on the point of speaking and never opened their mouths ; with them, she thought, a wife would be bored to death. Besides, Jimmy, pooh, a common workman, a josser ! While Trampy was an artiste, a bill-topper and rich, no doubt. You had only to listen to Trampy to see that he was very well off ! Chocolates, sweets, jewellery, ostrich-feathers, patent-leather boots, everything ! He would have loaded her with presents, if she had let him, but she had never accepted anything except a little gold ring, which she hid in her pocket when she came in ; for, if Ma had caught sight of it, gee, what a smacking !

Trampy often met her ; he seemed almost to do so on purpose ; he found pretty speeches, compliments which he had already uttered a score of times to ever so many girls, on ever so many stages, like a real Don Juan who had been all over the world and everywhere picked up love-speeches and jokes to " fetch " the ladies with. He tickled her vanity, told her that a dear little girl like her was cut out for dress, that a big hat with ostrich-feathers would go well with her fair hair and that men, by Jove, ought to go on their knees whenever they spoke to her !

All this hummed and buzzed in her head. At night, when she fell asleep in Maud's arms, she dreamt of big hats and fine dresses and referred to it during the day. Pa hardly knew what to think : if she did as well as last night—three encores—Lily could have half a sovereign, said Pa, to buy a new hat with in the Tottenham Court Road.

" Oh, Pa, I shall do all right, you'll see. Will you be very nice ? Then get me that two-guinea one, you know, in Regent Street."

" But you're mad, Lily ! " said Pa, without attaching too much importance to it, for he had other cares : agents to see, letters to write, business, damn it ! . . .

That took down Lily's cheek a bit ; but her luxurious ideas returned, nevertheless. For instance, from admiring the Gilson girl or the Three Graces, who looked like Venuses, in their silk tights, and whose entrance on the stage caused every opera-glass to glint upon them, the wish to appear in tights began to grow on Lily. Oh, not the plain tights of living statues ; no, but with flowers and leaves embroidered here and there and jet braid laced about the right arm. She was tired of bloomers and told Pa so, straight out, when the apprentices had left the room and Pa, stretched in his easy-chair, seemed in a good temper.

Pa thought this notion, about tights, silly :

"They're very nice, those bloomers of yours, those little shirts. Ask your mother."

"Oh, yes," said Ma sarcastically, "but bloomers are made at home, you see, in the afternoon ; you have to stitch them yourself, dear. Tights, which you buy ready-made and which cost ten times as much and last half as long, are much more convenient, aren't they, Lily ? To say nothing of the absurdity of an ugly girl like you showing herself in tights !"

"And the troupe," said Pa. "What would the troupe look like ? Might as well not have a troupe ; there'd be no one but you !"

"Well, what harm would that do ? I *am* the troupe !" said Lily, tossing her stubborn forehead. "And all the money you give them you could give me !"

"Lily," said Pa, alarmed, "you deserve to be smacked for that !"

"Oh, Pa, what an idea !" said Lily, who was just arranging her fringe before the glass. "A Pa to beat his Lily for a little thing like that, away from work !" And, darting a bright smile at Pa, "You never would, Pa, would you ?" she ventured.

Clifton, taken aback, looked at his Lily, as if to say

that she was right, damn it! But Ma, in her fury, cried :

“ Wait a bit ! You shall see if *I* would ! ”

Bang ! A box on the ears, followed by an order to go to her room, on dry bread and water, impudence ! And practise her banjo till the evening !

The blow itself was nothing, but what a humiliation for Lily, who, only yesterday, had been told that she had the sweetest nose in the world, cheeks to cover with kisses, eyes, lovely eyes : there wasn't a girl in a hundred with eyes like that, by Jove ! And those lovely eyes were only fit to cry with ! And those pretty cheeks Ma had covered with smacks ! When she thought of it, she felt inclined to kick over the traces. Did they think her such a kid, then, her Pa and Ma ? She'd show Ma if she was fourteen ! She'd be off like the others. Lily, at this idea, felt her heart come into her mouth : no, no ; she would never dare ; she never would. She swore it to herself ; took the great oath of the stage : three fingers of her right hand uplifted, the left hand on her lucky charm. And yet, one day, she would marry. She didn't lack chances, if she wanted them. And a gentleman, too ! And her Pa and Ma, to disgust her, of course, pretended that he was married ! They must take her for an idiot : how could Trampy be married, considering that he had suggested . . . suggested different things to her ? . . .

Lily brooded like this, reviewing the tiny events of which her life was made up. Then a gleam of sunshine came to change her thoughts. . . . She amused herself by breathing on the window-pane, making a circle. . . . wrote a name with her finger and quickly licked it out with her tongue . . . and Lily brooded . . . brooded. . . .

But Ma's voice made her jump :

“ What are you doing there, you good-for-nothing ? I told you to take your banjo ! ”

"Yes, Ma," Lily replied, mechanically, with her nose glued to the window.

"Do you hear, Mr. Clifton?" said Ma furiously. "That's the way she obeys!"

Mrs. Clifton had no doubt whatever that there was a man at the bottom of it . . . a flirtation . . . something or other. It was useless for Ma to provide for everything, to do her best to oppose Mr. Clifton's weakness. There was Lily now, taking up an independent attitude. She thought herself pretty, no doubt; some loony must have been stuffing her up, making love to her, to laugh at her later on! If she, Mrs. Clifton, had been a man, she would certainly never look at that ill-mannered baggage; but the London jossers fancied that brazen type! And to think that time was passing. . . passing. . . . Oh, Ma would have liked to get hold of the man who invented the law about girls coming of age! . . . And love . . . and marriage! A fierce jealousy seized upon her at the thought. Lily would have bouquets, champagne-suppers; Lily would be loved by gentlemen! Tell Lily that she was pretty and, in less than six months, the little hussy would think herself a fine lady! And, on that day, Mrs. Clifton would wash her hands of her!

These continued attacks ended by shaking Pa. He didn't quite know what to say; there was a certain amount of truth in it:

"But," he persisted, "why should she go? She has everything she wants here?"

But he was more and more annoyed; yes, he admitted, he was wrong to laugh at Mr. Fuchs: you must never set children a bad example. And, from that moment, once his attention had been called to the matter, he daily discovered fresh causes for uneasiness: where the devil did she get that love of dress from? And who sent her that bouquet behind the scenes the other night? Why,

Lily wanted to have it handed to her across the footlights, like a singer !

And Pa and Ma watched Lily like a bag of money on which one keeps one's hand, for fear of pickpockets. Ma doubled her precautions.

The gentlemen in the front boxes, especially, alarmed her, even more than the Jim Crows did : creatures apart, devilish creatures, the gentlemen in the front boxes ! She fancied she saw a reflection of hell in the eye-glass of every one of them. If ever Lily dared to smile to them, she knew what awaited her ! Ma would get angry for nothing at all ; she even scolded Lily for allowing herself to be approached on the stage by a contributor to *The Piccadilly Magazine*, which was publishing articles on "The Little Favourites of the Public."

"I am sure you only told him a lot of nonsense," said Ma. "A girl should call her mother in a case like that. What have you to do with the public ? Aren't you ashamed ?"

No, Lily was not ashamed. She was exasperated rather. And she had not told the journalist any lies : just the plain truth, in her own little way. Sweat and blood, damn it ! Broken legs ! Broken arms ! And here, there, there, all over her body, scars deep enough to put your finger in ! That would revenge her a bit for the way in which she was treated. She knew that, when the article appeared, she would catch it at Pa's hands : but never mind ! She had told everything, everything, in revenge ; just as she might have flung her bike at their heads in a fit of anger !

## V

THERE had been a terrible scene at home that day. Ma had searched Lily's trunk and had not, it is true, discovered the love-letters which she believed to be hidden there, but she had found a ring! It was Trampy's ring, which Lily, who usually concealed it about her person, had left by accident in the trunk among her things. Ma's face was a sight, when she came down to the dining-room. She was so upset that Pa asked :

"Are you ill, dear?"

Ma, without answering the question, pushed the ring under his nose and screamed that she had told him so :

"An engagement-ring, dear; an engagement-ring! Perhaps you'll believe me now!"

Pa and Ma, when they had recovered from their surprise, had time to lay their heads together and replace the ring, pretending to know nothing, to be watching more closely than ever . . . and then Pa had gone out; for, if Lily, who was walking with the apprentices, had come home just then, he could not have resisted the temptation to smack her face. It was better to go out and postpone the explanation until later. He had, indeed, resolved never to beat his daughter again . . . but still! And he clenched his fists and ground his teeth when he reached the theatre.

On the stage, he looked round for Tom, who should have been there to mend a tire. He saw nothing at first: only a few electric lamps studding the darkness; a faint

glimmer lighting up a number of properties ; farther on, the dull gleam of stacked-up bikes ; and, lastly, Tom, with his cap cocked back and trousers turned up, trying—br-r-r-r !—to do a clog-dance !

“ Bravo, Tom ! ” shouted Clifton, the moment he saw him. “ Just you wait a bit, I’ll teach you to dance : with the clogs on your hands and your head downwards, damn it ! Here, take this to go on with ! ” continued Pa, fetching him a clout on the shoulder. “ And get to the bikes and hurry up, or I’ll smash your jaw in ! ”

Meanwhile, Jimmy had also come, unseen by Pa. And the great batten lit up : the stage came to life again. Right up above, in the galleries from which the ropes were worked, mysterious forms moved to and fro. The iron curtain rose . . . there was a clash of orchestra . . . Jimmy, with his back against the drop-scene and his face to the stage, gave sharp orders. . . .

Pa watched the scene vaguely from the wings. He gnawed his moustache : the apprentices would be there soon, with his Lily. . . . And he had something to say to the stage-manager ; something of a delicate character. . . .

But Clifton was surprised to see Jimmy instead of the usual stage-manager :

“ Hullo ! So it’s you now,” he couldn’t help saying.

“ Why, yes, Mr. Clifton ; since this morning. The other chap’s ill, you know. Mr. Kellermann asked me to take his place . . . for a few days, I suppose . . . or perhaps longer. Do you want to speak to me, Mr. Clifton ? ” added Jimmy, observing Pa’s look of embarrassment. “ Just a minute and I am at your service.”

Two tall footmen, caparisoned in velvet and gold, disappeared behind the curtain with the number of the next turn. They came back in a few seconds. Jimmy pressed a button. The stage filled with light and noise, the turn marked on the programme entered and, suddenly,

under the dazzling light, it was a series of somersaults, of flights from shoulder to shoulder, and the muffled fall of feet on the thick carpet.

"There will be eight minutes of this," said Jimmy, taking out his watch. "What have you to say to me, Mr. Clifton?"

Oh, what he had to say was very simple; he wouldn't have mentioned it himself, but Mrs. Clifton had asked him to. To cut a long story short, wasn't it a shame that gentlemen should throw bouquets on the stage when Lily was giving her show? Like last night, for instance: why, it was making game of a child, putting ideas into her head! Lily, of course, paid no attention to it. Still, was it or was it not allowed to throw or send bouquets on the stage?

"Why, you know it is!" said Jimmy. "How would you have me prevent it?"

If he could have prevented it, he would. To begin with, Jimmy realized the bothers which it brought down upon Lily. Moreover, Jimmy, who was vaguely uneasy himself, wondered who that ardent admirer could be. Some of Roofer's girls thought they had recognized Trampy, from the stage, in the front seats. What Jimmy had heard of Trampy did not inspire him with confidence. And Trampy, it appeared, was making love to Lily. Mr. Fuchs had met them at the corner of Oxford Street and Newman Street. The story was quite definite.

Jimmy was astonished at the audacity of a Trampy: what could he say to her? He asked himself, what could he propose to her? Marriage? He was married, they said, in America. To run away with him? His scandalous life, his habit of easy conquest made this very likely. Jimmy had seen plenty of others, big ones who topped the bill and who did not despise a girl's companionship—on the contrary—and, six months later, a year, two years



later, left the girl in a hole, stranded, undone ; mustard and game for Jim Crow. And he grew more and more anxious on Lily's behalf : not that Lily would come to that ! Yet he had seen plenty of them, since he had frequented the stage, plenty of Lilies who had taken to flight for injuries often less serious than hers. He could have mentioned names : his head was full of those who let their anger or their folly get the better of them and who escaped at random and went back to everyday life—through the door of scandal—sometimes to meet with worse : a martyrdom of the heart, base exploitation in the name of love. Oh, he pitied them from the bottom of his soul ! No, Lily wouldn't run away : it was impossible ! But what a pity, all the same, that he could think of it ! And what chance, what meeting would settle her fate and make her—who could say ?—the companion of a loving heart, or a prey to some footy rotter ? Oh, how he would have liked to go for Trampy, to break his jaw for him, to teach him to mind his damned business and leave Lily alone ! And what Jimmy wanted to do he was never far from doing ! And, then, oh, if he could have procured a good position for Clifton, as a compensation for the loss of his star, and make Lily love *him*, marry *him* : that would be better still !

This idea, perhaps without his knowing it, dominated his present life, doubled his power of work : to invent something ! To get himself talked about ! To make money, plenty of money, become somebody ! Others before him had risen from nothing. Kellermann, to go no farther . . . a chap who had climbed every rung of the ladder : a small music-hall first ; then two ; then a big one ; then two ; then ten. And a whole army now toiling and moiling for him every night, for him the chief and master.

" Oh ! " thought Jimmy. " If I could only climb the ladder too ! "

First of all, he must choose his line, for his efforts to tell. And, since chance had given him a start at the theatre, why not go on? Here his scientific luggage would be of use to him. It was only a question of adding pluck to it. He was the man to do so; and now more than ever. Things which used to seem impossible to him, such as his invention published in *Engineering*, appeared quite feasible, now that he had watched Lily do her wonderful feats of balancing on the stage. It was only a question of courage and hard practice. Another line suggested itself: to find capital and start a theatre. As regards the stage, by this time he understood the management of it from grid to cellar. He seemed to take in at a glance that huge entirety, from the flies with their windlasses, their bridges, the labyrinth of stairs, the maze of passages, down to the dressing-rooms and the painted faces that filled them: here, a Lily; there, a buck nigger; farther on, a living-picture girl. He felt all this rustle round him, carried it all in his head: he knew it all, from the porter's box at the stage-door to the glittering front of the house, with its palm-trees and its liveried chuckers-out. Jimmy knew what to think of the enchantments of the stage, those luminous visions which the audience admired to the tune of the orchestra: jealousies, vanities, hatreds to knock up against and calm down; recruits to put through their paces; and the whole day of it—and the whole night, too—for a few pounds a week and the tips from the artistes, say, twenty-five to forty shillings a month.

But Jimmy had his idea: he was determined to obtain a thorough grasp of the business; he had already taken possession of the stage-manager's room and of his desk with the many compartments: photos, programmes, contracts, electric light, staff, scenery. A whole small people depended upon him and asked his advice, bragged of its

successes or told him of its misfortunes. And here again was Clifton continuing his jeremiads : they would drive his daughter silly by making game of her, pretending to be in love with her, at her age ! Jimmy listened attentively, with one eye on the stage and the other on his watch :

" Tut ! " he said, trying to arrange things. " There's no great harm in receiving bouquets on the stage. However, as you object, if any more come, they shall be handed to you, to dispose of as you please. That's all that I can do."

It was gradually filling up behind Clifton and Jimmy ; the iron door was constantly slamming upon the passage ; knowing-looking Roofer girls passed two by two, always two by two, joked for a moment with the scene-shifters, shook hands here and there, disappeared up the dressing-room staircase. There was life, swarming life, everywhere, in the corners, behind the back-cloth. The New Zealanders arrived, with Lily and her Ma ; for Ma never left her now, for fear of the gentlemen who prowled around like famished hyenas : villains who did not hesitate to throw bouquets on the stage to make ugly girls think they were pretty !

Lily seemed sad. She stopped for a moment. A haunting serenade droned across the stage, a Spanish melody sung by soft tremolo voices, with tapping of tambourines. It reminded her of Mexico : everything reminded her of that time now. She compared herself with Ave Maria. Oh, she would have liked to tell the whole world how she was treated, just the plain truth, in her own little way ! But no one cared, not even that rotten jossler of a journalist, with his article published in *The Piccadilly Magazine*. It made her out a spoilt child, who had learned to ride in the country-lanes, with her French governess, and who had surprised her father and mother by coming home one

day with her head on the saddle of her bicycle and her feet in the air, thereby causing an unparalleled scandal in that old Yorkshire family. Since then, they had been obliged to yield to her fancies and allow her to go on the stage with her little troupe of friends. Her salary? Ten pounds a night. Her recreation? The banjo. . . .

"Rotten josser of a journalist!" thought Lily.

Nevertheless, she was flattered at heart, because of the ten pounds a night and the governess.

But things happened to distract her thoughts: the Three Graces entered in their turn, followed by Nunkie; they stood talking for a few moments, while the apprentices went and dressed; and Lily soon followed them, after a last glance at a little woman and her "partner" who were getting things ready for their performance—some little hoops, two cardboard bottles, gilt balls—and then waited humbly in the shadow.

Lily recognized Para, who used to exhibit a troupe of parrots; somebody had put her "in his show," no doubt: the Para-Paras, a new turn.

"How poor she looks!" Lily could not help whispering.

"You'll be worse off yourself, some day," said Ma, "if you go on as you're doing! Don't laugh at other people.

During this time, there were the same trailing gleams on the stage, light and shade by turns, like the country under the galloping rain-clouds, on a stormy day. The great iron curtain fell for the entr'acte.

Lily dressed quickly and came down to the stage with the Three Graces; and they had ten minutes' joking behind the scenes, while Ma was still upstairs, busy with the girls. Thea walked on tip-toe, to restore the circulation to her legs; Kala practised her back-bendings: Lily applauded with the tip of her thumb-nail, flung back her head and laughed and, from time to time, looked round over her shoulder to see if Ma was coming down.

She amused herself also by feeling Thea's arms, all those little muscles which stood out, man's arms : she would have liked to nestle in them, to feel herself squeezed till she screamed. And everything around them savoured of love : there were lots of Roofers ; little intrigues were embarked upon ; there were stifled fits of laughter and cries of " Hands off ! " and " Stop ! " Amorous speeches and stories of romantic adventures were exchanged in whispers ; the flight of the Gilson girl, a week ago, at Liverpool, was told in full detail ; a Roofer, giving a high kick yesterday, had sent her slipper flying into the audience : it was returned to her filled with chocolate-creams ; and to-day there was a bouquet with a letter in it. . . .

Ting ! The curtain, the light ; and, on the stage, the Roofers were glittering with gold and silver ; and their boyish voices came in gusts, punctuated by the jerky flights of their short skirts.

" Your old sweetheart, eh, Lily ? " said Thea, pointing to the boy-violinist, who had just arrived.

Lily had only a careless glance for the boy-violinist, who was wiping his eye-glasses and pulling at his cuffs, while a call-boy was adjusting the false seat into which two bull-dogs would presently dig their teeth. All the fascination was gone for Lily : he was no longer the child prodigy ; a grotesque Orpheus, in a laurel-and-parsley crown, he now introduced his music-hating dogs, who interrupted his performance with plaintive and angry howls and ended by leaping at the seat of his trousers in a mad rush across the stage.

Lily, who had gone through the mill, looked upon him as a mere josser, had for him the instinctive contempt entertained by the real artiste for those fiddlers, those singers, those dancers and other drones brought up with blows of the hat.

"Pooh! I have some one better than that!" exclaimed Lily, excited by the proximity of the Roofers.

"If you have any one better than that and he loves you," said Thea, in a dreamy voice, "love him, Lily, keep him; as for me, I no longer risk having to do with men."

"I do!" Lily whispered, with a frightened glance around her. "All I can! I love talking to men! Why, Thea, don't you like love-letters and p.-c.'s? . . ."

Ting! Orpheus left the stage, with his bull-dogs hanging to him.

Ting! It was dark again; ropes, plated rings were let down from the flies; the Three Graces, like quivering marble statues, took one another by the hand to make their entrance.

Ting! From their perches on either side, two electricians sent the limelight shooting down on an involved group of ropes, bars and hardened limbs.

Ting! A crescendo in the orchestra and, bowing to the audience across the footlights, the Three Graces made their exit, their smiles suddenly hollowed out into tired wrinkles, but cheerful nevertheless. And Nunkie wiped their foreheads with his checked handkerchief, helped them on with their big cloaks; and the three goddesses were now just a wrapped-up group, limping off to the staircase, like gouty patients at a spa.

Ting! A forest scene is let down, the wings are shifted. A click of chains, a flash of steel. The bikes in the shadow, the apprentices mounted, Lily leading.

"Now try and do your best, my Lily."

"Yes, Pa."

"And try and behave."

"Yes, Ma."

Ting!

Lily gave a nervous smile. She always felt a little thrill before going on. Then, quick, in Indian file, two and two,

three and three, the New Zealanders whirled round in the light, to the roar of a triumphal air.

Pa ground his teeth and clenched his fists the moment he heard "his" music : at the mere sight of his Lily, his seven stone of flesh and bones adapted to the machine, unerring and exact, an immense intoxication exalted his pride, gladness dilated his heart. At last ! He was there now : German discipline ! English grace ! Everything ! He, too, would have his London home, with a lawn behind the house and a plot of rose-trees. He would learn the meaning of family-joys, as Nunkie understood them, with texts all the way up the staircase : "Welcome !" and "God bless our home !" And, more and more excited, he built up his dream ; his imagination gave itself scope amid the unreal scenery, the forest depths, the green-and-gold sky and his Lily, his faultless Lily, haloed in light ! Every hope was permissible when he looked at his Lily, his joy, his handiwork ! His New Zealander on Wheels ! That india-rubber suppleness, those little nerves of iron, his Lily, his glory, his star, his own star ! He romanced about her, dreamt of an Imperial tour, a steamer of his own, a floating Barnum's show, with Roofers, elephants, rhinoceroses, Ave Marlas, dogs, monkeys, the whole boiling ; and Lily starring on her bike, stopping in every port, from Liverpool to Suez, from Suez to Yokohama : down to the desert, damn it, to show the whole world what an artiste he, Clifton, he, the father, had made of his Lily ! And he looked at her with loving eyes, applauded her with a smile, restored her self-possession with a twitch of the eyebrow and counted her twirls on the back-wheel—O pride unspeakable !—a dozen !

Ma, standing by him, interested herself less in the show and, neglecting the artiste, watched the daughter and the faces she made at the gentlemen : the brazen flapper, whose sole attraction lay in the wickedness in her blood !

She never lost sight of Lily and watched her closely, for Ma seemed always to catch her throwing an appealing glance to the seducers in the front boxes, to some St. George in full dress who would dart across the foot-lights to carry off her daughter.

Thus held between Pa and Ma, Lily felt that her plight was hard indeed. As for the audience, she never troubled about it, from custom, like a true professional, who gives her performance mechanically, without minding about the rest. The audience, to Lily, was, behind a streak of flame, in the semi-darkness, a confused mass of black and grey. All this had no existence for Lily or the apprentices. The audience didn't pay them ! The audience wouldn't give her a whacking, if the show went badly ! Pa, in the wings, frightened her much more than all the audiences in the world ; and Ma was worse still, when a gentleman smiled at her from a box. Then Lily would stare at her Ma with the terrified eye of a parrot contemplating Para's whip. She even exaggerated, pinched her lips, like a school-girl applying herself to her book for fear of the ferule. Ma did not ask so much as that ! Sometimes, when Lily, after a successful trick, threw out her chest to draw breath more easily and rode round the stage with a pretty smile on her lips, Ma saw no harm in it, even rejoiced within herself at her daughter's beauty. Ma knew how to be just and was not the one to be angry for nothing. But what she could not forgive, what exasperated her was, just that very evening, with her own eyes to see Lily smile at some person unknown and shoot fiery glances at the front boxes, the little devil, who would bring them to the grave with shame !

For Lily, it must be confessed, flung prudence to the winds that night. Her head was turned with all those love-stories. They sang in her ears, they distended her nostrils. Oppressed on every side, she escaped in imagina-



tion towards that spacious house, towards the confused mass in which her lover sat hidden. And, in spite of Pa and in spite of Ma, who stood watching her in the wings, Lily searched the audience with her eyes. Was it really Trampy ? Had he come back ? She had not met him for some time. She wanted to know and he would surely reveal himself. Ma might say what she pleased. Even in the final pyramid, she looked, while, with one apprentice on her shoulders, another forked before her, another standing behind, two others on either side, she twice went round the stage, with flags waving, to the hurricane of the orchestra. And then . . . ting ! And darkness anew, the stage suddenly invaded by scene-shifters dragging heavy sets along ; and Lily, passing out, was seized by her Ma, who said :

“ Who were you laughing at ? ”

“ I wasn't laughing, Ma ! ”

“ I'll teach you to make eyes at gentlemen, you baggage, you ! I saw you this time ! I saw you,” growled Ma, who had the engagement-ring still upon her mind. “ You shall pay for this, Lily : we'll see if I can drive the devil out of you or not ! ”

And Ma squeezed Lily's arm as if she meant to break it, but all this noiselessly, in the shadow, behind the scenery, for fear of the stage-manager. Besides, it was nobody's damned business what a mother thought fit to say to her daughter ; and Lily, when people passed, tried pluckily to smile, so as to put them off, not to let them know that she was being beaten, a big girl like her ; but, as soon as they were gone, she resumed her rebellious face :

“ I wasn't laughing, I wasn't laughing, Ma ! ”

“ That'll teach you to tell lies ! ” said Ma, catching her a blow in the back of the neck.

The door of the staircase had swung to behind them ; and, in the empty passage, the thumps continued all the

way to the dressing-room, which the apprentices had not yet reached. Then, once inside, Ma pushed the bolt and made a rush at Lily. And Lily raised her elbow in vain : accompanied by a furious series of grunts—"Ugh ! Ugh ! Ugh !" —Ma's diligent fist signed a "contract on her back : "

"And don't you dare to cry out, or I'll give it you twice as hard ! "

Lily, bruised all over, felt inclined to scratch her mother, like a wild cat ; but the apprentices were coming. So she cooled her head in a basin of cold water and dressed with all speed, assisted by Ma, who perhaps regretted having been so hasty ; but you had to be, with devils like that ! And Ma's anger returned when, on reaching the stage again, she was herself, in accordance with Jimmy's orders, handed a bouquet intended for Miss Lily. What, another ! Lily, following her down the stairs with the New Zealanders, saw Ma take the bouquet and toss it through the open door.

"Come along," said Ma. "Give me your arm, Lily."

And the New Zealanders walked away from the brightly lit-up music-hall, plunged through the drifting crowd, crossed the eddy of cabs, motors, 'buses and, on the pavements, through the windows, had visions of elegant couples at sumptuous tables. Then they all went through the dark streets ; and Lily, escorted by Pa and Ma, followed the herd of girls. Her face was hard ; and, from an angry brow, she shot glances askance at flight. . . .

## VI

Now Trampy—even if he had to marry her for it, by Jove!—had set his mind on having Lily, at any cost ; and that not only because of her prettiness, but so that he might play Clifton a damned good trick and teach him that he must smart for treating a gentleman as he had treated Trampy in Mexico. It would be paying him out with interest to take his Lily from him. Besides, think of the credit it would give Trampy in the profession to have for his wife the prettiest, the cleverest girl on the boards, each of whose shows, when she performed alone, would be worth at least three pounds, as much as a whole troupe ! He suspected in her the ripe fruit that was bound to drop ; and he shook the tree to hasten the fall. He considered his reputation at stake : he, the man with the thirty-six girls, as he was called at the music-hall. He got caught in his own toils and wanted Lily madly, out of revenge and pride . . . and jealousy too, for he suspected that Jimmy was courting her ; and the idea that he had a rival inflamed his ardour.

In the evening, pen in hand, in his dressing-room, or else at a table in a café, after a second and a third glass of port, he prepared his batteries : letters, post-cards, he excelled in everything, was careful about his phrases, with the vanity of an author whose writings are widely quoted. Lily was “fascinating” and “bewildering ;” he compared her to “those strange Indian poppies whose scent intoxicates a man and sometimes gives him death.”

Gee, but that set Lily dreaming ! Fancy having all that in her ! Who on earth would have thought it ? Never mind, it was very nice.

And the way in which she received her correspondence amused her as much as the rest. Trampy, it goes without saying, did not write direct : a few pence to Tom, who hated Clifton, and Lily received the cards in secret, devoured them when she was alone and then quickly tore them into little pieces and sent them flying through the window.

Her trouble was how to answer. She really did not know what to say :

“ Pa was so angry with the girls yesterday. I got a kick of the pedal on my shin. Otherwise I am quite well. Excuse more for the present. I must now conclude.

“ LILY.”

By return of post, she received “ a thousand kisses on her rosy cheeks, on her fair tresses, everywhere,” kisses without end.

“ He’s mad,” thought Lily.

But she was greatly flattered by Trampy’s attentions. He treated her as a woman, not as a child, as Pa and Ma went out of their way to do. Her life, after all, would be pleasanter if she were Trampy’s wife ; and he was delivering the attack in person, since his return from Lancashire, where he had travelled about with his property red-hot stove. He overwhelmed her with bouquets, as a general bombards a bastion before the final assault ; and he now managed to meet her. He dazzled Lily with his big gold watch-chain and the diamond pin in his tie. When he was able to whisper a word to her, it was always the same thing—“ Motor-cars ! Paris gowns ! Jewels ! Flowers ! ”—until Lily thought she saw all the shop-windows in Regent Street poured out at her feet.

Jimmy made but a sorry lover, compared with Trampy. He never promised anything, silk dresses, diamonds or jewels. "The husband at work, the wife at home." Gee, there were no ostrich-feathers in that! But he adored her all the same, as Lily was well able to see; and she had many occasions to talk to both of them. Not that Lily was less closely watched. She never went out alone; but it was not always Ma who was at her heels: it was sometimes Glass-Eye. With faithful Glass-Eye, things took their own course and the interviews with Trampy became easy. As for Jimmy, he saw her every day at practice; and Jimmy took that opportunity to tell Lily of his ideas, his plans for the future:

"I shall succeed, you will see, Lily," he said. "I shall do something some day. I'm a bit of a mechanic, a bit of an electrician, that is to say, a bit of a wizard. Others have started lower down and climbed very high."

"Yes," replied Lily, "I know. It's like Pa. He wasn't much before he got me into shape; and look at him now!"

This was said with an artless candour that enraptured Jimmy.

"What a dear little girlie you are!" he said. "What an adorable kid!"

"That's right," retorted Lily. "Why not a baby, while you're about it, a school-girl in the biking-class and so on? Some people treat me as a woman, Jimmy, and propose to marry me!"

"What's that? . . ."

"What I say, Jimmy."

"And this man making up to you is worthy of you, I suppose? And do you love him?" asked Jimmy, greatly upset.

"Pooh!" said Lily. "I'm not quite sure."

"But you wouldn't marry him unless you loved him?"

"I should marry him to change my life."

"A change, Lily," said Jimmy, with feeling, "is not always a change for the better! And your life is a little pleasanter now, you told me so yourself. Your mother is sorry. You're getting pocket-money: ten shillings a week, eh? Why, Lily, that's splendid!"

"Well; and I earn it, I suppose," said Lily. "And Ma isn't a bit sorry. Pa said he wouldn't have it, that's all. They were afraid of my running away, if it went on. I am no longer a child!"

"No," said Jimmy, taking her hands, "an adorable girl; that's what you are. Oh, a man whom you would love should do great things! He would love you with all his heart! And your life would be different then! No, you would not be a performing dog, as you call it; you would be a darling little wife. It's all very well to rove about the world, from theatre to theatre, riding round and round on your bike. . . ."

"I adore the stage, for all that!" interrupted Lily.

"But it can't go on for ever," continued Jimmy. "You're entitled to have a nicer life: a home of your own, Lily; you have the makings of a lady in you, if you were taught. In a year or two, Lily, you would be the equal of any lady in the land."

"Learning, more learning, always learning! I've had enough of learning in my life!" muttered Lily, affected, nevertheless, by Jimmy's intense excitement and lowering her eyes under his glance.

"Why, yes, Lily, always learning, that is life!" said Jimmy. "But the other chap, of course, promises you the earth! Some millionaire, I suppose: an admirer in the front boxes?"

"He's an artiste," said Lily.

"Why . . ." said Jimmy, stepping back, without letting go of her. "But no, it's impossible; you're not thinking of Trampy!"

"Why not?" said Lily angrily, trying to release herself from Jimmy's passionate grasp.

"Why, because . . . because he's a drunkard . . . a . . . The other day I saw him at the bar of the Crown, as I was passing. He was blind-drunk."

"What's the good of talking?" said Lily. "He's miserable. He worships me. He drinks to forget. He told me so himself!"

"But they say he's married," said Jimmy. "Why . . ."

"It's mean and jealous of you to say that," said Lily, suddenly withdrawing her hands. "You deserve a smacking! How can he be married, when he wants to marry me?"

And with that she left him and went up to the dressing-room.

Jimmy was heart-broken :

"No, no; it's impossible," he kept on saying to himself. "It's a joke of Lily's . . . as in my shop, some months ago, when she pretended to have a sweetheart, though she hadn't!"

But, argue as he would, Jimmy thought with terror of Trampy's habits of conquest, of his reputation in the profession as a Don Juan. He bitterly regretted waiting so long to speak to Lily. He had thought that he was pleasing her by keeping in the background, for fear of causing her annoyance at home : was his sole offence now that of coming too late?

Oh, if he had only had evidence to hand! But Trampy's marriage was one of those vague rumours. One could say nothing for certain. However, the danger, no doubt, was not yet imminent. And Jimmy had a friend who was doing America in the theatres of the Eastern and Western Trust: he resolved to write to him; the friend would receive his letter at the Majestic, Houston, Texas, or at the Denver Orpheum. The thing had happened over

there ; they would probably remember it in the theatres he passed through ; he could make enquiries, perhaps even obtain proofs. That exquisite Lily, that masterpiece of grace : what a darling wife she would make ! And all for Trampy ! Jimmy was determined to do everything to prevent it.

He did not despair of supplying Lily, before long, with proofs that Trampy was married ; he would give the name, the date ; he would compel Trampy to admit it. But he was not sure enough yet to accuse him openly : Lily would have seen nothing in it but a ridiculous jealousy and would never have forgiven him.

Then Jimmy was worried : people came to him for this, for that, for the thousand details of the stage.

Lily, on her side, left the theatre. That day, she was accompanied by Maud, who fixed her with her glass eye, while the other was engaged in watching the dicky-birds. Of course, Trampy was prowling round the theatre to see her a part of the way home ; for he, too, had decided to carry things with a high hand. And he set to work at a quicker pace than ever.

He had none of Jimmy's scruples ; he was not afraid of exaggerating : far from it. Lily always left him under the impression of a glimpse of paradise. This time, however, she failed to smile when Trampy vowed that she was " the sweetest little thing that one could lay eyes on, by Jove ! " For a long time, but especially since that morning, she had been burning to put a question to him. Possibly, she had no intention of marrying him ; but she wouldn't allow him to make a fool of her ; and she interrupted him in his compliments to ask if what they said was true. . . .

" Who says so ? It's a lie ! " Trampy hastened to answer.

" I mean your marriage," replied Lily.



"I thought as much," said Trampy.

"Tell me the truth," persisted Lily, innocently, looking him straight in the eyes.

"If I was married, Lily, should I want to marry you?"

"Of course not," said Lily, already shaken.

"Who's been talking to you about that?" asked Trampy. "Your Pa, eh? And Jimmy: I'll bet Jimmy. . . ."

"Jimmy too."

"If I don't punch that fellow's head!" shouted Trampy. "Can't you see he's jealous? Why, he didn't even give you my bouquets! He handed them to your Ma! And so I've been married, eh? Where? In America, I'll wager!"

"Yes, somewhere on the Western Tour."

"Of course!" said Trampy. "That's what I've heard myself. Still, it seems to me that, if I had a wife, I ought to be the first to know it: what do you think, Lily?"

This was proof conclusive. Lily could find nothing to answer.

"Come and have a drink, Lily?"

"They're waiting for me at home," said Lily.

Trampy went into the bar alone, in a desperate state of love which made him call for a port . . . and another, by Jove! Then he sat down at a table in a corner, lit a cigar and examined his glass, as though truth lay at the bottom. For he could not tell for certain. Was he married or was he not? That's what he himself would like to know! According to him, upon his soul and conscience, he was not a married man; he did himself that justice. Opportunities, certainly, had not been wanting . . . with all the girls he had known . . . enough to fill a dozen beauty-shows. Sometimes, even, he had had a narrow shave, as in that damned town in the West, in one of those States where you can't so much as take a girl to supper

without finding yourself married to her in the morning, all for entering yourself in the hotel-book as "Mr. and Mrs. Trampy," in other words, as man and wife. And yet he couldn't ask the girl who adored him to sleep on the mat! Yes, a poor girl who had found glowing words in which to tell him her love, one night, in Mexico, words which had set Trampy quivering with longing compassion: was he to be reproached with that? He had made her happy, after all; and, on the whole, this spree was one of his pleasantest memories; it hadn't lasted too long: a matter of a few weeks at most. He had left Mexico, taking the girl with him, and played Trampy Wheel-Pad in the Western States, with any amount of success, by Jove! Encores, packets of tobacco, a new suit of clothes! And, by way of entr'acte, the girl—"Trampy Wheel-Pad's Jumping Flea," as she was called—turned somersaults and flip-flaps. But she would have been the death of him, this dark girl with the great dark eyes, this girl with the boy's figure, all muscle and sinew, keeping him awake the livelong night and talking of nothing but smackings, as though she had never learnt anything else. And so much in love that she would bite and scratch: a very tigress. Any one but himself would have wearied of it. And then, one fine morning, for coupling their names in the visitors' book, they found themselves married, in the name of the law! And that was what people called a marriage! So little married were they, according to him, that he had given her the slip then and there, leaving her all the money he possessed, however: he was not the man to look at fifteen dollars, where honour was at stake. Trampy had had more stories of this kind in his life; they left about as much impression on his mind as the recollection of a "schooner" swallowed at a bar on a summer's night.

It was dishonest, he considered, to pretend that he was married. Not that he was perfect: far from it! He did

not set up as a model. He had had scandals in his life : he admitted it humbly ; and, if some jealous person, some Jimmy, for instance, wanted to do him harm, all he had to do was to dig in the heap, instead of hawking round that story of an imaginary marriage.

His differences with Poland, the Parisienne, for instance : a regular Mrs. Potiphar, that one. He had found it a hard job to get away from her. And ever and ever so many others ! He couldn't remember. People were always talking ill of him. There was more than that, however : he, too, was capable of manly ambition ; he, too, had taken a break-neck risk. He had perfected and patented at Washington an invention of which he had seen a drawing, by accident, in a scientific journal—*Engineering*, or another—a purely theoretical invention. The inventor himself, a young London electrician, declared it to be unrealizable. Well, he, Trampy—Poland had helped him with her purse ; she was very nice about it—he, Trampy, had had the thing made. He had deposited the models at the Patent Office ; and the apparatus itself was now in a London storage. He would get it out, some day, and show them all what he was capable of.

Now he was wrong, perhaps, in abandoning Poland, after accepting her services ; but, after all, those were matters which concerned nobody but himself. It was not fair play to tell Lily about them : she, he felt, would always be the girl of his heart, the thirty-seventh and last, and it would take a better man than Jimmy to snatch her from him !

Already, it was much to have pacified Lily on that incident of the marriage : Lily believed him. One thing, however, disquieted Trampy : bigamy, all the same, meant doing time. Now, if some jealous person produced the proof of that marriage, contracted under the Western law . . . suppose it were valid . . . really valid ? H'm !

Was he going to lose Lily for that? And his liberty into the bargain? That Lily who was worth her weight in gold, love and fortune combined!

Trampy resolved to broach this delicate subject:

"Suppose I were married," he hinted, one day. "That wouldn't matter. Couldn't we . . . er . . . live together . . . eh?"

"I like your style!" said Lily, feeling slightly indignant at such a proposal. "What do you take me for?"

"I was only joking," Trampy hastened to say. "If you want to be married, I'm quite agreeable."

"I insist upon it!"

"So then you prefer to take strangers into our confidence?"

"What strangers?" asked Lily, in surprise.

"Why, the quill-drivers at Somerset House and those damned fire-escapes."

Lily had enough religion to know that the fire-escape was the clergyman:

"As for that," she said, "we shall see later; but I want the registry-office. If I'm to be your little wife, I want to be so for good and all: marriage or nothing!"

"I shall be delighted, Lily!"

"And I'm determined!"

Lily was the more bent upon it, because marriage made her free: that was the essential point. If she were not married, her parents could make her come back, she thought . . . keep her with them . . . gee! It gave her cold shivers down the back! Once married, she was protected by law; Pa and Ma had nothing to say; and so she was very keen on marriage.

"What a dear little wife she'll make!" thought Trampy. "And how she loves me!"

That, however, did not advance matters. It was all very well for him to put his arm round her waist, to talk

softly to her, to whisper those words which had already won him so many conquests—one day, even, he had kissed her on the lips: Lily thought that very nice—it was all very well for him to cut a dash at the bar, to stand her a claret and a biscuit; it was all very well for him to sing his love-litany: all this did not help him; at the rate at which he was going, he wouldn't get any "forrarder" in six months.

Lily, between those two jossers, amused herself immensely. How lucky she was! Two men, at her age! They irritated her, sometimes, when they went too far—Trampy, especially, who got excited at the game—but, anyhow, it was a homage paid to her beauty. Between that and going away with him there was all the difference in the world! To leave home was quite another matter. Why, goodness, if things went on as they were, she could do without marriage at all!

## VII

"LILY, come downstairs at once!" Pa's voice thundered from below.

Lily was out of bed in a bound. She could hardly tie her skirt-strings for trembling. Why was Pa in such a rage?

The moment Lily entered her parents' room, she realized what had happened. Pa was holding a letter in his hand and scowling at her:

"These are nice stories I hear," he cried. "You let men kiss you, do you? You've got a love affair? Come, Lily, is this true?"

"It's Jimmy's doing," thought Lily. "The mean cur! He's given me away!"

Pa went on hotly:

"And you're going to get married, are you? To marry Trampy, are you? Here, read that!"

Lily felt hopeless. She took the letter, but did not attempt to read it. White with fear, could she have sprung through the window and fled, she would have done so.

"Well," Pa went on apace, growing more and more excited, "is all this true? All that they tell me: about your receiving letters, post-cards, jewellery . . . and that ring! I've seen it! You're going to marry Trampy, are you? Oh, the man who writes to me knows all about it, saw you with him at the corner of Oxford Street and Newman Street. Is that true, miss? What did you have to tell him, pray? Speak out!"

Lily, terror-stricken, could only droop her head.

"Then it's true that you want to get married, you baggage!"

"Pa!" cried Lily.

But he, with an "Ah!" of rage, sprang upon her, clutched her mass of hair, banged her head against the wall:

"On your knees! Say; 'I—beg—your—par—don!'"

And bang! And bang! And bang! The phrase was punctuated with thumps.

"Oh, Clifton," Ma implored, "stop! Not so hard!"

"Beg—par—don! Beg—par—don!" continued Pa, without relenting.

Lily was half stunned; the world throbbed before her eyes; and, delirious with wrath, she hissed:

"Never!"

"But I say, I say you shall not marry him! I'll kill you first!"

"Yes, I will marry him—yes, yes, I will marry him: kill me, if you like. God is my witness that I had not thought of getting married; but, as you say so, I will!"

His fist closed her mouth. She clasped her arms about her head, to protect herself as best she could, but soon sank to the floor, fainting. . . .

For three days she was in bed, broken, dazed . . . then, no sooner on her feet, than off to the theatre, guarded by Pa and Ma. If they could, they would have padlocked a chain to her ankle and a collar about her neck. Ma chilled Lily with her scornful pity, or racked her with repeated insults:

"A disgrace to the family! You'll be the death of us!"

She would shower cuffs upon Lily, throw books at her head, or whatever came readiest to hand. Lily hid the books, the umbrellas, shrank into corners, longing to cry; but the tears refused to come. She was too angry. And,

with head down, but eyes alert, she crouched like a dog rebelling under blows, with lips drawn back above her teeth, ready to bite.

"I'm going out : if I stayed in, I'd kill her !" Pa would growl, slamming the door behind him.

Pa was thoroughly upset : to think of Lily leaving him ! Just when Hauptmann was starting a fifth troupe ; when Pawnee was drawing full houses with his three stars ; when competition was increasing and threatening : it meant disaster, certain ruin, the disbanding of his troupe, his contracts cancelled. He seethed with indignation ; or else, in despair, felt like taking Lily in his arms, seating her on his knee, begging her to tell him that it was all a nightmare, that she would never marry, never marry that Trampy : his good little Lily . . . whom her Pa would cover with diamonds ! She should have all she wished, anything, if only she would assure him that it was not true that Trampy, that ungrateful cur, whom he, Pa, had picked out of the gutter, was going to steal his Lily !

That damned Jim Crow ! Pa, in his fury, bought a revolver to blow out the footy rotter's brains, but Trampy received the tip from Tom and vanished—hey, presto !—leaving no trace, allowing no sign of himself to crop up anywhere. And Pa's rage was vented on his daughter.

Happily for her, Lily was now a model of conduct. She felt thoroughly calm. Peace seemed to reign in the house. Lily was such a gentle little thing ! One day even—the day on which Tom passed her a note from Trampy and she made a parcel of her new dress and of her photos and souvenirs—that evening, as she kissed her father and mother, tears came to her eyes. Then, instead of going to the kitchen, she fetched her bundle, stealthily opened the street-door and ran to the corner, where Trampy was waiting in a hansom, and hi, off for the holidays, champagne and the long-dreamt-of Paradise !



PART SECOND

PLAYING 'EM IN

I

THEY were seated on the basket trunk marked, "Trampy Wheel-Pad," in big black letters. The steamer had left Harwich and was making for Holland. The English coast was disappearing in the mist. On the deck, a heap of luggage and parcels made a sort of nest for them. Trampy, with his dear little wife by his side, was thinking of the future . . . so many things which he had flashed before Lily's eyes and which he could not give her . . . not directly, at least . . . but, pooh, she'd get used to it by degrees! The great thing, to Trampy, was that he had his Lily! He was going to stuff himself to the throat with love and, first of all, to seek a shelter for his sweet wife and himself. England was no place for them. Pa was prowling round . . . and Jimmy, too. Once their anger was over and they found themselves face to face with the irreparable, everything would calm down; meantime, the wisest thing for Trampy and Lily was to be prudent and run away as fast as they could. Trampy had his plan, he had seen the agents: Holland and Belgium first; then a performance at Ludwig's Concert House, in Hamburg, and a brilliant first appearance before a hall filled with managers. Already he saw himself in the

famous little room of the Café Grüber, where so many contracts were signed during the few days that the hearing-season lasted, and then he would have the whole continent, from St. Petersburg to Lisbon, make heaps of money, treat Lily like the little peach she was and cover her with diamonds, by Jove! Trampy, meanwhile, was none too easy in his mind: funds were low; the two pounds paid at the registrar's office had lightened his purse still more. Fortunately, the fire-escape had not had his seven-and-sixpence: that was so much saved.

"A poor consolation," thought Trampy. "The price of a dog-licence."

But he was gay, nevertheless, in his wife's company. He forgot his thirty-six girls. He told Lily stories, made her squirm with laughter, had all sorts of fun with her, dazzled her with the champagne-suppers . . . which they would have later on. Or else, like the consummate mummer that he was, he put on the gloomy countenance of a man about to reveal the secret of his heart:

"I'm a wretch," he muttered, while Lily, in her innocence, Lily, who had been living on tenterhooks since her flight from home a few days before, turned her frightened eyes upon him. "A miserable wretch . . . I'm married. Yes, it's true: I'm married, Lily!"

"It's true what they said? You're married?"

"Yes, I am."

"Oh, I knew it!" said Lily, in despair. "But then . . . if you are . . . I'm not!"

"You silly little thing!" said Trampy, kissing her and taking her on his knee. "Yes; I'm married, yes; and no one shall separate us. Haven't I the prettiest little wife . . . here, on my knee . . . my little Lily?"

"Oh, how you frightened me!" said Lily, nestling against him. "Oh, don't ever let us part!"

To a wife like that, said Trampy to himself, a little

discomfort more or less made no difference. As long as she had her dear husband, she would be happy. She would have eyes for nothing but him, would not care a fig for all the rest.

She loved him : there was no doubt about that. Why, she had left everything for him ! He could even have had her without marriage, by Jove, and saved two pounds, if he had insisted ! So he thought, at least, and he put a conquering arm round Lily's waist, while she, with her head on his shoulder, dreamed and dreamed, her eyes fixed upon the horizon. She was married ! She had dared ! She would be, at last, the little lady she had always been by instinct ! And Lily went on building her castles in Spain until, after the smooth crossing, arriving at the Hook of Holland, she would not have been surprised to find her own motor-car and servants waiting for her on the quay. But no, she had to carry her bag herself, under the fine drizzle, upon the slippery pavement, to the train . . . and third-class to Rotterdam. It was all very well for Trampy to adopt a triumphant air, but Lily was greatly vexed at the idea of going with her husband to a little hotel frequented by artistes, bill-toppers though they were. She would have liked something different.

Trampy observed that, with her Pa . . .

"With Pa," said Lily, "it was not the same thing . . . and I'm not with Pa now."

Trampy showed himself accommodating. That evening, Lily had the proud satisfaction of walking into a smart hotel, with waiters in the hall, as at the Horse Shoe. She carried her head high, conscious of being looked at ; she would have liked to shine like that always, to sit down to meals amid the rustle of silk dresses . . . but she felt uneasy in her modest attire. Trampy would have been only too pleased to give her a new outfit, later on, yes . . . but, as he explained to Lily, he had had so many expenses

recently . . . wouldn't it be better to take rooms somewhere, in a sort of place like Lisle Street, or St. Pauli at Hamburg? Lily yielded to these arguments—she had to; but it was a bitter grief for her to leave that fine hotel, where everybody saw her as a lady . . . perhaps because of her big hat, on which a bird, flat-spread, opened wide its wings and held in its beak a diamond the size of an egg.

And, thenceforth, the mean life returned: Lily relapsed among the potatoes and the wash-hand-basin salads. There were occasional revolts, tart words, sudden disputes, which, at times, wrinkled her forehead with anger. . . .

Nevertheless, she had her good moments: she enjoyed the sensation of being a lady who does no work, of wearing gloves and a big hat and of looking at the time on her fine gold watch while her husband was on the stage. It seemed pleasant to her no longer to appear before the audience doing her performing-dog tricks, with Pa scrutinizing her from the wings. It was her turn now to make one of the small nation—pas, mas, profs, bosses, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters—watching their breadwinners on the boards. She mingled with them, or else sat down prettily in a corner, talked to the artistes: other Martellos, other Nunkies; new faces every week, according to the theatres they were at: owners of troupes; sketch-comedians, serio-comics; dancers of the Roofer class; laced-up, glittering "Mdlles.;" or else, from time to time, some josser, a friend of the manager's or an agent, prowling around among the flesh-coloured tights. Lily had seen all this a hundred times, a thousand times before, when she was with her parents; and the mere thought of Ma made her talk nicely to all of them, from bravado, though she was married now. Lily bore Pa no malice, in spite of the buckled belt. Pa was a man, with hair on his chest, and harsh, like all of them . . . no, not all . . . and not so bad, perhaps . . . not always . . . no; still, a man.

. . . But her Ma, a lady, ought to have stood up for her ! If Ma could see her now, gee ! Lily felt a lump in her throat at the notion. And it was their fault that she had run away ! It served them right ! She was much happier, now, when she was a lady in her turn. Her talent and her beauty received the homage due to them. Lily Clifton, the New Zealander, what ho ! A famous name in the profession ! She was one of those whom the stage people point out to one another :

"Gee !" she sometimes heard a voice say behind her. "Fancy owning a girl like that and not having the sense to keep her !"

Lily was flattered to the core at hearing her parents blamed ; she felt inclined to rise and say, "'K you," with the great stage bow : her right hand on her heart, the other raising her dress, her body bent forward in a sweeping curtsy.

She took part in the conversations : she knew a little Spanish, which she had learnt in Mexico, and a little German, which she had picked up in America from the Three Graces ; and besides they all jabbered English, they were all "families," "misses," "the's," with impossible accents, suggesting some of those cosmopolitan towns beyond the Rockies. In this medley, she was at her ease ; but she did not like being called Lily, now that she was a lady :

"Call me Mrs. Trampy," she said.

After the show, she would sit in the restaurant with Trampy. There, amid clouds of tobacco-smoke, they all supped in a crowd. There were separate tables, at which silent little parties gobbled down their cutlets and compote in ten minutes and then slipped away quietly. Sometimes, a whole band of girls would swoop down at once, like a flight of thrushes, or exchange funny remarks over other people's heads and blow volleys of kisses in every direction.

Trampy, always full of good stuff, amused the company. He lorded it in the select corner, the corner of the stage-manager and the pretty girls. After supper, he cocked a cigar between his teeth and told thick stories in the midst of an admiring throng. Lily followed with her lips, so as not to lose a word; but, when the final point was at hand, she blushed in advance, turned away her head, as though tired of listening without understanding, and talked to her neighbour, like a lady who respects herself. Or, sometimes, it was more than she could help and Lily would laugh and laugh :

“ Oh, dear ! Oh, my ! ”

Then they would talk shop, among pros ; they passed one another the papers : *Der Artist*, *The Era*, *Das Program* ; they discussed engagements, told personal anecdotes : the Ma who made her star go down to the kitchen, lest the landlady, when peeling the potatoes, should slip one into her pocket. Yes, her own daughter, a star who brought her in a hundred marks a day !

“ That’s just like it ! ” thought Lily.

They made fun of that prof who, pretending to smile, pinched his apprentices till the blood came, or clawed them like a monkey. And the company laughed and laughed, especially when Trampy put out his hand to Lily to show her how the monkeys . . . Lily would jump back and the crowd roared with laughter. And the glasses of beer and Moselwein accumulated on the table ; and round backs were bent over interminable games of cards. . . .

And then, gradually, the room emptied ; the girls went away and Lily, waiting for her husband, sank into her chair and yawned as though her jaws would drop. As they left, she reproached Trampy for his coarseness : those horrid stories which made her blush before everybody’s eyes. Her Pa would never have permitted himself. . . . She was not accustomed. . . .

"That didn't keep you from splitting your sides with laughter," said Trampy.

"What an idea!" replied Lily, in a vexed tone. "Do you think I'm going to play the goody-goody lalerpelooser? One has to do as others do and not make one's self conspicuous."

"Quite right!" said Trampy.

But she turned crimson with rage when Trampy, some other night, forgot himself so far as to monkey-claw the girls. There were short violent scenes when they returned home, chairs upset, angry words. Trampy could not understand this jealousy. When confronted with these outbursts, he was greatly surprised, sought for a reason, muttered Jimmy's name—that was his sensitive point: he thought of it in spite of himself—ironically enquired of Lily if it was Jimmy who had put all that nonsense into her head. Lily was sorry to see the conversation take this turn. She flung her arms round her husband's neck, kissed him prettily, the great silly: he knew better; he knew she never thought of Jimmy:

"Kiss me, darling! I wish you would make me happy," said Lily, moved to pity for herself. "I want to be a good little wife!"

Thereupon they made it up. Lily did not have, with her husband, that thrill which she had often noticed in other women: but she wanted to love him, stubbornly pursued the idea, fagged away at her love like a little school-girl only too anxious to learn. Trampy, on his side, could be amiable when he liked. He became the old Trampy again, at times, and treated Lily like a little playfellow. They would both run about in the *Biergarten*, in the morning, at practice-time, larking like children, hiding behind the tables, and their laughter enlivened the empty place, still soiled with the remnants of last

night's meal and littered with programmes and cigar-stumps.

And time passed like this for weeks—it was months now—an existence like another, with good in it and bad, monotonous and commonplace. . . .

"I should have been better off, perhaps, at home," she thought. "If this is marriage, it's not much."

For, she saw it quite clearly, *that* wasn't love; Trampy didn't understand her. A "girl" and a wife were all the same to Trampy: a mere pastime, both of them. He spoke of it lightly, through the smoke of his cigar. She learnt to know him, heard him boast of his prowess, caught passing words:

"Girls, girls, my!"

She would have laughed, she would even have felt flattered at being chosen among so many, if he had put an end to his conquests. But he continued to prowl round the stage-girls, as he used to do before he was married. If even he had shone upon the stage, she would have understood that he had got "swelled head," that he was yielding to temptation; but his success was only middling. He had not made a hit at Hamburg. The manager of Ludwig's had told him flatly that he would do well to practise and practise a great deal. Trampy posed as a victim of jealousy, spoke of showing them, all of them—if once he put his back to it!—a new turn, a discovery that would prove what he was made of! Meanwhile, he had a new idea, as a sketch-comedian, a make-up of his own invention, the face painted white on one side and red on the other, with wrinkles cunningly drawn: a laughing Johnny and a crying Johnny, two men in one! He pestered Lily with his plans, made her cut out dresses for him, came back from the old-clothes shop laden with uniforms in rags, into which Lily had to put patches. And shoes, in particular, ran in his head;



shoes of which the soles and the uppers yawned like lips ; talking shoes, which said, " Papa ! " and " Mamma ! " This last suggestion made Lily laugh.

Trampy haunted the bazaars, bought children's toys, took the stomachs out of the cardboard dogs and rabbits to make his quackers with, hunted about for his right note, pursued inspiration to the bottom of his glass.

Lily was sometimes driven to exasperation. This tramp-cyclist, this sketch-comedian was making her, Lily Clifton, patch up his dresses ! And her husband rewarded her for it by making love to the girls, poor idiot ! Oh, if Pa and Ma had not been so harsh with her ! Lily always harked back to that, stiffened herself with the thought, remembered the Marjutti girl, in whom love of art produced wonders and whose Pa and Ma were so gentle and kind :

" They should have treated me like that," she concluded, " and I should have been at home now ! "

She regretted her marriage. And there were some who pitied her for belonging to Trampy : they looked upon him as not worthy of her, blamed him for openly carrying on with girls. Others asked, as though it did not matter, was she really married or were they living together ?

" What ? Am I married ? Is that what they think about me ? " she said, a little annoyed. " Of course I am ! At the Kennington registry-office ! "

And yet a doubt entered her mind too. Was she really married, after all ? Lily did not know much about it. Had the banns been published ? And those two witnesses picked up in the street . . . a ceremony that took just five minutes . . . like a conjuring-trick. If it was true that they were " living together," without her knowing it, she would not stay with him. She would go back home at once. Marriage, certainly, was never meant

for her. She realized that. When she thought of the Gilson girl, mad on her man, and of others whom she sometimes caught in the dressing-room and passages eating each other up with kisses, she was at a loss to understand. How could they make so much fuss about it ?

Poor little wife, with so little love for her husband and no admiration at all ! As an artiste she thought him beneath contempt. Trampy, who had seemed so great to her in Mexico . . . why, she had shot miles ahead of him since ! She felt that he was getting second-rate. He himself was well aware of it, for that matter ; blamed everybody ; suspected a hoodoo somewhere : some son of a gun bringing him ill-luck. And he was always casting about for an easy means of success . . . another new plan . . . always something new . . . a high-sounding title : " Rusty Bike," an old jigger which, at each turn of the wheel, would grate like a cart—" Crrrra ! Crrrra ! "—and bring the house down with laughter, while Lily, in the wings, was to sound an accompaniment on a grating rattle :

" Crrrra ! Crrrra ! "

" All that set-out for nothing ! " said Lily to herself. " It would be much simpler to have a little talent."

She felt herself overcome with scorn for her husband : what a sorry breadwinner he made ! Why take a wife, when you had only that to keep her on ? Lily did not know whether to laugh or cry when she saw Trampy come down from his dressing-room, proud as a peacock, his chest swelling at the sight of so many girls at a time, a treat of which he never wearied. He was magnificent, was Trampy, against that background of shoulders, thighs and calves : in his element as a fish in water. Nor did he make any bones about smiling to them, or monkey-clawing them, as they came off the stage. The presence

of his wife did not hinder him. He was sure of her love : he knew she must adore him, as all the others did. And, leaving Lily in a corner, in the shade of a pillar, with his eyes he devoured all that powdered flesh, all those coarse wigs.

Lily hated him at such times. She could have boxed his ears. She had enough of it, at last. One evening, she caught hold of his arm to take him away, furious that a gentleman could find pleasure in making his wife look so ridiculous ! And Trampy, more or less flattered at what he considered a fond wife's jealousy, was turning to go, when a lady with plumes on her head and a woolly dog under her arm greeted him with :

"Hullo, old boy ! Glad to see you, Trampy !"

Lily—it was a distant memory, but no matter—recognized Poland, the Parisienne, with the painted face and the strong scent. Trampy took a step backwards. He half expected a scene, though he owed her nothing, after all ; but she did not seem angry : no, on the contrary, she looked at him with a roguish eye. She knew of Trampy's marriage, no doubt, as she knew of his conquests, having been his victim herself :

"Hullo, old boy !" repeated Poland, sizing up Lily with an appraising glance and then fixing her eyes upon Trampy. "Still having your successes, old boy ? Is this your number thirty ? Thirty-six ? Thirty-eight, eh ?"

"What !" Lily broke in, astounded at such manners. "What number thirty-six, thirty-eight ?"

"Ugh ! A number in a lottery," said Trampy, looking quite vain between those two women in love with him. "Yes, a number . . . with which I drew a prize ! . . . Why, by Jove," he continued, addressing Poland, "this is my wife ! . . . Lily Clifton ! . . . The New Zealander on Wheels."

"Oh, yes," said Poland, to Lily. "I did hear that you ran away: tired of this, eh?"

And, tapping the back of her left hand with the palm of her right, she made the professional gesture that denotes a whipping.

"Yes, I was a bit," said Lily feeling rather proud than otherwise. "I've been through the mill, I have!"

"You've had your fair share, eh?" insisted Poland. "You're not the first that has left her family to escape being whipped. You did quite right," she concluded.

Trampy was dumbfounded and utterly floored by the revelation. What! He! He! Lily had married him because of that! Because . . . And people said it! And talked about it!

"Come along, Lily," said Trampy. "Let's go home."

And, giving no further heed to Poland, who followed him with a mocking smile, he took Lily by the arm and went out with her.

Lily felt her arm shake. Trampy was furious, evidently. She saw her mistake, too late. There would be a stormy scene when they got in. Well, who cared? She was resolved, under that stubborn forehead of hers, to face the facts. She had had enough of this husband. And she meant to know, that very moment, if she was married or not . . . because with him one never knew. When she admitted that she had married him because of "that," Trampy, in his humiliation, would put her out of doors at once; if the marriage wasn't valid, he would get rid of her. There was no doubt about it.

And she did not have to wait; for, even before they were out of the theatre, in the passage, among the trunks and properties, Trampy, unable to restrain himself any longer, seized her by the wrists and looked her straight in the face:

"Is it true?" he asked, in a voice trembling with rage.

Lily, without replying, lowered her eyes as though to say yes, like a good little wife, oh, so sorry to offend her husband !

“ And,” said Trampy, choking with shame, “ you married me for ‘ that : ’ *me*, Trampy ! ”

“ Yes,” said Lily, confusedly.

“ You damned trollop ! ” cried Trampy. “ Oh, if we weren’t married for good, wouldn’t I just make you sleep out to-night ! ”

## II

POOR Lily! She was Trampy's little wife, his little wife for good! And life, monotonous and commonplace, followed its usual course: a week here, a week there; and the theatre every night at the fixed time, according to the scene-plot which they went and consulted on reaching the stage: "X, 'Corridor,' 9.5; Z, 'Wood,' 10.17; Y, 'Palace,' 11.10," and so on. And for Trampy it was an everlasting grumbling at his ill-luck, a dull anger at "playing 'em in," so sure was he of seeing his name first, always—" 'Garden,' 8.30, Trampy Wheel-Pad"—he who had had such a success in England with his red-hot stove. It was no use his saying to himself that it wouldn't last, that it would be better next week. It was just as though done on purpose. He played 'em in, always, from Bremen to Brunswick, from Leipzig to Magdeburg:

"I wish I knew the son of a gun who has his knife into me!" growled Trampy, persuaded that he was the victim of an agent's jealousy, or else the stage-managers didn't understand their business!

"If you had more talent," thought Lily to herself, "that sort of thing wouldn't happen. I'd like to see you with Pa: *he'd* show you, *he'd* make you stir your stumps, you rusty biker!"

However, she was careful not to say so to him, for fear of blows; and Lily knew that, if ever she received them, once, twice, without returning them, it was all up with

her, she would lapse under the yoke again, it would become a habit : there would be nothing for it but to leave her husband, if she wished to avoid slaps, just as she had left her family, to avoid whippings.

That would have been too grotesque. She did not want to give Pa and Ma the satisfaction of seeing her unhappily married. Lily armed herself with patience ; and she needed it ! For Trampy was in a frightful temper, said that he would have been the ideal husband if she had been the little wife he had dreamed of : but to think that she had married him for " that ! "

Now it was the constant allusion to " that " which made him die with shame. Everywhere, on the stages of the different music-halls, people had for Lily that sort of sympathetic pity which they feel for a performing dog : they approved of her running away ; everybody seemed to know about it. Poland, it must be said, scored a fine revenge upon Trampy . . . without counting the artistes who had seen Lily practising and who knew what harsh treatment meant, the Munich Roofers, among others, real ones, with their blows of the hat, gee !

It became the fashion among them, when they saw Lily, to tap the back of their hands and then to applaud with the tip of the thumb-nail, as though to approve her flight. Lily at first was annoyed at the reputation for cruelty which they were giving her Pa. He was right to hit her, she thought, sometimes. She was also annoyed on her own account. She was an artiste, damn it ! It was not only a question of smackings ! Why, if she hadn't had it in her . . . ! It was a gift ! But, on the other hand, to excuse the folly of her marriage, she let them talk, without protesting, like a poor little thing who would still be with her Pa and Ma if she had been treated " fair."

And there were always angry disputes between her and

Trampy. They were seen to disappear through the stage-entrance, Lily with an arrogant air, Trampy drooping his head, his lips distorted with stinging replies. Lily, though she was not performing at the theatre, sometimes received a letter there. When there was one for her in the heap of envelopes, bearing the stamps of all countries, which had been round the world prior to "waiting arrival" in the door-keeper's pigeon-holes, Trampy looked at her furiously, wanted to know. Lily refused to tell him. Forthwith, in the passages or on the stage, endless disputes went on between them . . . oh, not in the least tragic in appearance, and interlarded with "Hullo, boys!" and "Hullo, girls!" to left and right, whenever they passed any acquaintances. Then, in a low voice, abruptly:

"Show it to me, you wench!"

"Shut up, you footy rotter!"

Trampy could not forgive Lily for marrying him on account of "that." He, who had only to choose among the crowd that walks the boards or flutters about in muslin skirts, suffered from Lily's scorn, looked upon himself as a sultan dethroned before the eyes of his harem. In order to infuriate Lily, though he did not feel in the least like laughing, he exaggerated his conquering ways. It ended by affecting his work. Only the night before, he had got drunk with two "sisters" out of ten: the fourth and seventh from the right. Result: he was still in bed when the matinée began. And his performance went so badly that they had to drop the curtain on him. That would pass for once: an illness was allowable; but it couldn't go on at that rate. He was becoming worse than the head-balancer who tumbled off his perch, without having his excuse of sorrow—the loss of a beloved wife—seeing that he, Trampy, had a dear little wife and very much alive, this one!

Lily, in her calmer moments, foresaw that they would



soon have to face hard times, flat poverty, even. She felt her contempt for Trampy increase. Those sketch-comedians, those tramp-cyclists, pooh, they were less than nothing, bluff, that's all, as old Martello said !

She saw her dreams flung to the ground. At first, it had been charming for her, so full of novelty, but, after all, she had only changed masters. She ended by considering herself more unhappy than she had been with Pa and Ma. To begin with, Pa always had money. She brought them in a lot. She lived much less comfortably with Trampy. She used to think that being a married woman would change everything, whereas—not a bit of it !—there was no change at all : potatoes, coals, all sorts of dirty, messy things ; and no Maud to help her. And it was always as in the old days : damp sheets, dirty glasses, rickety tables, beds with worn-out mattresses ; and the nights were dull as ditch-water. Trampy had hoped for something different, expected to find a whole harem in Lily, his thirty-six girls in one, including Ave Maria, with her body like a wild cat's. Alas, it was far from that !

Lily loathed those nights. Love, yes, but not that, not that ! Sacred love, not profane love : Lily had seen the paintings in the museums and remembered the title. Love meant lying ever so nicely on the breast of the dear one, yes, as with Glass-Eye, and dreaming of hats and diamonds. No doubt, it was ambitious to want so much. She, who had seen everything, had never come across that ; but it was what she wanted, what she had been promised, damn it ! Things, now, were going from bad to worse. Memories of her childhood moved her almost to tears, when she thought of it : those happy times in Africa, on the straw beside the horses, the stars seen through the tent, and the smell of the elephants. When she was there, perhaps, it had seemed less sweet to her : the hard ground, the noise

of the chains ; but everything was made more poetic by remembrance : it was the past, what ! Nights sweet as milk, far from a man reeking of tobacco. And not only her early childhood, but her life of yesterday returned to her : touring with the troupe, the oatmeal porridge, and the cakes she made—bricks ! But Pa laughed at them, took them good-humouredly, whereas Trampy lost his temper. In those days, it is true, she wasn't a lady, she used to work ; but they had good fun, all the same, in the dressing-rooms : they had tea at the theatre, romped in the passages, or else did crochet-work, to pass the time ; and all those practical jokes, intensified by distance : packing Glass-Eye into the hamper ; coaxing the black cat into the dressing-room, for luck ; or making the pantomime lady speak her tag ; or going in to the Roofers, on some pretext, and giving a whistle which made them all rush out, dressed or undressed or half-dressed, never mind, and spin round three times to ward off the ill omen : all those memories touched her till she felt inclined to cry. Oh, if she had been with her Pa now, she would have sat on his knee and begged his pardon !

At such times, if Trampy became affectionate and tried to kiss his little wife, Lily would simply turn her back on him. Poor Trampy ! And he could not play the master ! For, call on the agents as he might and write as many fine letters as he pleased—an art in which he excelled—work was becoming scarce. He no longer had any money. One pay-day, Trampy was obliged to confess that he had had his salary in advance and spent it ; a money-lender held his contract and kept back three-quarters of his pay. Trampy, tormented by urgent needs, had let himself in with a Brixton “financier”—a specialist in “loans from five pounds upwards, music-hall artistes treated with the strictest confidence”—who pocketed nearly the whole. Now Lily just happened to want a new

dress, a new petticoat and a tiny mother-of-pearl lucky charm. Trampy had to own that he couldn't afford these fancies ; and Lily had a fit of temper ! Then why promise so many things to a poor little wife who deserved better than that ?

"A poor little wife," said Trampy, "should marry her husband for love and not to escape whippings ! There are ups and downs in the profession. It was your own look-out ; you shouldn't have married a star !"

"A star !" cried Lily, with a nervous laugh. "You a star ! A damned comedian ! A nice sort of star, indeed ! If a music-hall had twenty black cats in it, you'd turn them into a white elephant !"

In other words, Trampy, according to her, was a Jonah, only fit to play the people in, if that !

"A wife has no right to speak to her husband as you do !" exclaimed Trampy, leaping up under the insult. "You deserve a good thrashing !"

"None of that !" cried Lily, ready to fly at his throat.

"A wife," resumed Trampy, with great dignity, "helps her husband, instead of insulting him."

"We're in for it, I suppose !" said Lily.

"Certainly we're in for it ! I have no engagement now, but that's no reason why you shouldn't find one. Look for one and work !"

Lily was in for it, knee-deep, as she said. She was not excessively astonished : it was the inevitable end ! Not that she disliked work : her idleness, on the contrary, was beginning to pall upon her ; but it was the humiliation of going back to it after putting on so much side and posing as the lady. She had worked for Pa ; now she would work for Trampy ; it was natural and proper. There were exceptions—the wife at home, as Jimmy said, that jossier !—but they were rare.

"Take up your bike again," said Trampy, after a pause.

"Be a good little wife ; help me out of this. I have something in my mind, a scheme which will make us rich ; you'll see, later on."

"But," said Lily, "I haven't a stage bike ; and yours is really too ugly."

"I know of one for sale."

"Very well, I'll work," said Lily. "I'll make them give me that tour which they promised you and didn't sign for ; and to-morrow you shall see !"

At heart, Lily was not sorry to show her husband how people got out of a scrape, when they had talent ; and, the next day, she went to an agent, accompanied by Trampy, looking very dignified. Her cheeky feather was kept dancing attendance for a moment ; and then she was shown into the office. Lily Clifton ? The New Zealander on Wheels ? Straight away, a contract, signed in duplicate ! A week in each town ; later on, perhaps, a month in Berlin, at the Kolossal. Lily displayed wonderful tact, did not triumph too openly over Trampy. She acted to perfection the part of the little lady who takes up the bike again just for fun—as in the time of her "French governess"—or rather of a dear little thing wholly wrapped up now in her wifely duty : her poor husband ill, she herself needing exercise, just for fun, you know.

On leaving the agent's, she bought some material ; then ran home to cut out her stage dresses. In the evening, Lily was still hemming and stitching, indefatigably, seized once more with professional pride, after her excursions into private life. And, all night, under the lamp, she contrived, cut out and sewed. Then came practice, without Pa. In an hour, in spite of the new machine, which put her out, she had picked up her "times" again. She felt as if she had been spinning round the night before, under Pa's eye, so absolutely at her ease was she, with her head on the saddle or twirling on the back-wheel.

And, on the following Monday, her first appearance, her name on the walls: "Miss Lily" in big letters, right at the top of the posters; "Miss Lily," not "Mrs." or "Madame." Had she had ten children, two husbands and three divorces, she would still have been "Miss," everywhere and always, as a further attraction for the swells in the front boxes and as a certificate of youth. There were mighty few husbands, on the continent especially; not more men of any kind than could be helped, on the stage, except a few noted "profs," standing by the perches of velvet and steel or under the trapezes, displaying, beside the pink-silk tights, against the "Palace" backdrop, the faultless correctness of their full-dress suits. But, for the rest, people preferred to ignore husbands, brothers and "friends:" Lily had known some husbands who never showed themselves at all, who remained squatting at home, so as not to stand in their wives' way.

Trampy, for that matter, knew better than to parade himself with Lily. And he preferred it so. He could have wished one thing to the exclusion of all others: that people should not know of his marriage, that they should cease to speak of it. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The story of the whippings was enlivening Lisle Street, exaggerated, as usual. The Bill and Boom Tour, the Kellermann Tour were beginning to spread it on every stage in England; before six months were over, it would have made the round of the world from the Klondike to Calcutta. What a disgrace for Trampy! Yet no sooner had he put his New Zealander on her wheels again than Trampy blossomed out once more. After all, who cared if people were seen smacking the back of their hands? He wasn't to be put out by a little thing like that.

"Just so," he seemed to say. "We are married, whippings or no whippings, and I am the master; I have set her to work again; and there you are!"

Trampy's reputation, so far from suffering, increased ; all his compeers now envied him from the bottom of their hearts ; the bosses, the profs, the managers, the Pas, the Mas treated him, in their own minds, as a lucky dog, all the more inasmuch as Trampy was not uppish and gladly stood drinks, while his wife, " Miss Lily," made money for him with her break-neck tricks. It was much smarter than doing it for one's self : the great thing was to have a " girl " like that ! Trampy was having his revenge : he had been laughed at ; he now had the laugh on them ! and enjoyed glorious times, in the *Biergärten*, or lounging at street-corners, near the stage-door, chaffing the girls, hat cocked back, hands deep in his pockets, a cigar stuck between his teeth. He told the story of his life, not without pride ; said that he must write it one day, sell it to *The New York Standard* for a thousand dollars. The girls he'd had to do with : whew ! His love adventures, all over the world, by Jove ! And his marriage with Lily Cifton, the New Zealander on Wheels, a dear little wife, so gentle, so obedient !— No, he had no reason to complain of his life. He would write it, mark his words ! To say nothing of a scheme he had in mind :

" Just you wait and see ! It's a trick to make a millionaire of you or break your neck."

" Will you make Miss Lily do it ? "

" I'll see, I'll think it over," said Trampy, in a lordly tone.

The directors, the stage-managers took no notice of him ; but, among the artistes, Trampy Wheel-Pad was some one, he enjoyed his leisure, recovered his self-assurance : if, in addition, he could have destroyed the legend of the whippings once and for all, he would have been perfectly happy. He turned the conversation on the subject of smackings in the music-hall generally, in the hope of hearing them contradicted or made little of ; but it was

no use : every one believed in them ; all, boys and girls, even the most spoilt, quoted facts : blows which they had received, my ! Blows hard enough to split the front of a music-hall from top to bottom ! The nation with the painted faces, the blue-chins seemed to vie with one another as to who had been most through the mill.

"You're exaggerating," said Trampy. "It may be true, to a certain extent, in your case. But, Miss Lily, for instance : do you mean to say you believe all she has to tell ?"

"Oh, quite !" said two Roofer girls who were standing by.

They had seen Lily practising. And they knew what it meant. They had had their share, too : old Roofer, gee ! And Lily had done quite right to run away from her whippings.

"There you go again !" said Trampy. "Can't you see she's humbugging you ?"

But he pulled himself up suddenly if Lily arrived, for, in spite of his big airs, he was all submission in her presence.

"Oh, really ! Glass-Eye caught it instead of me, I suppose," said Lily, drawing back her shoulder as though threatening to smack him, "when Pa went for me with his leather belt. And I have witnesses. I've been through the mill, if anybody has : that much I *can* say !"

Lily, after this burst of pride, would lower her head, a trifle embarrassed, like a dear little thing, all wrapped up in her duties as a wife, a wife whom her husband would cause to break her back one of these days, perhaps.

This created a circle of admirers around her : all, besides, agreed in saying that you had to have the business "rubbed into your skin" to be as clever as she was.

"'K you !" said Lily, with a stage bow.

It was certain that she made a hit. They wanted her

everywhere. She was asked to perform in tights. The engagements grew better and better. "Miss Lily" was more and more talked about. It was no longer a Trampy Wheel-Pad on a rusty bike : it was grace, youth . . . and stage-smiles fit to turn the heads in the front boxes. When Lily appeared on the stage, she transfixed every white shirt-front, every opera-glass. She took a real delight in it all. Her beauty captivated the audience. In her pink tights, Lily looked quite naked and turned and turned and turned, to the hum of the orchestra, against the "Wood" back-drop of purple and gold. Then she came back to the wings, all excited by her show, received bouquets, chatted freely with the pals. She met old friends : the green-eyed female-impersonator, for instance, pressed her closely. He, too, was touring Germany : a week here, a week there. Chance brought them together again. He was quite smitten with Lily : how lovely she had grown ! He would have liked to adopt her. . . . Lily threw her head back, laughed and repelled him with a thump in the ribs when he tried to kiss her.

Another time, she saw the Bambinis, who were playing, by a lucky accident, at matinées only and by special permission, because of their age. She larked with them like a child. Elsewhere, it was Nunkie Fuchs on his way to Vienna, where he was going to see to the building of his pigeon-house, leaving the Three Graces for a few weeks on the Kellermann Tour. He had seen Lily's name on the posters and had come to say, "How do you do?" to her.

And, amid the thunder of the band or the lull of the entr'actes, Lily received tidings of her Pa and Ma and details of what happened after her flight, as reported by Glass-Eye Maud. After Lily's departure, they had hunted everywhere. Then Ma thought of looking in the trunk : the pretty dress was gone. Then they had rushed to the theatre : no Lily. Then they had guessed : Lily had run



away. Ma fell on her knees and cried and cried. Pa seized his revolver and spoke of going to shoot the man who had robbed him of his child! His little Lily gone! And the contracts had to be cancelled and Pa did not go out for a week and the house remained still and silent for a month. Pa, thoroughly upset, cried whenever Lily's name was mentioned and was near dying of shame when he felt himself blamed, even by those who used to congratulate him on his way of turning out an artiste, and Nunkie himself maintained that one must know how to handle young girls: gentleness above all.

Lily bit her lips when she heard that. Her little nose tingled. She hardened her features, wrinkled her stubborn forehead, lest she also should cry.

"If I had to do it again, I would!" she said, quickly, just like that, without reflecting, in the way one says a thing to one's self which one knows to be untrue.

They also told her things that made her laugh. Glass-Eye Maud no longer left her hole, cried like a tap, so much so that, one day, Ma, noticing an insipid flavour in the porridge, threatened her with the sack if that sort of thing went on.

As for business, people did not know exactly. Pa, they said, had written to one of Hauptmann's "fat freaks" to take Lily's place. The reply ran:

"No, thanks; I'm all right where I am.

"FAT FREAK."

The signature was underlined, for people had ended by hearing about Pa's disrespectful remarks. Lily laughed when she heard this: my!

"I will come . . . when you take to braces!" another had answered.

This was an allusion to the blows with the belt; and

Lily, with head thrown back, full-throated, her hand on her heart, laughed . . . laughed . . . laughed :

"Bravo, girls!" she said, applauding with her thumb-nail.

And Tom? Tom had had the boot, with a punch on the nose, for carrying letters to Lily. For Pa ended by learning all: some one had told him.

"Jimmy, that son of a gun!" said Lily.

And Jimmy himself, what had become of that josser? Jimmy was no longer stage-manager. He had left everything after Lily's flight. He, too, had flown into a terrible rage when he heard about it . . . spoke of Trampy as a thief in the night . . . would have killed him, if he had met him . . . and he was going to star in his turn.

"Singing?" asked Lily.

"No, something to do with the bike."

"What a fool!" thought Lily. "Fancies himself an artiste because he used to mend my bike for me!"

Jimmy, it seemed, had hired a huge shed and there, all alone, fitted up some apparatus of a complicated kind. He never went out by day. He worked and worked. A trick to break your neck at, it seemed, or to make your fortune.

"Those jossers!" exclaimed Lily, scornfully.

And what was he going to do on his bike? Nobody knew. There was something published in the papers, they said. It was something on the back-wheel.

"What rot!"

Lily laughed open-mouthed, laughed with all her muscles, twisting her hips, splitting her sides, smacking her thighs. What! Jimmy on the back-wheel! He! He! He cutting twirls, that josser!

"And the troupe?"

The troupe nobody knew about: dispersed, most likely; the troupe, after all, was Lily. When she went, every-

thing was bound to fall to pieces. Pa didn't care either ; told any one who would listen to him that he was going to retire to Kennington, that he was well off now . . . thousands of pounds in the bank . . . made his fortune . . . meant to live on his dividends.

" I knew it," said Lily ; " I knew I had made his fortune ! Thousands of pounds, damn it ! "

" Lily, don't swear like that ! " said Nunkie Fuchs. " It's not right ! "

Lily lowered her head, taken aback ; excused herself, like a lady who knows her manners.

" And yet," she said to herself, " if he had had my troubles, that old rogue, perhaps he would have sworn too ! "

For Trampy was becoming terrible : life was impossible with him. All the money which Lily earned went on champagne . . . and on girls, probably ; and the more she earned the greedier he grew. He wanted money, heaps of money ; Lily had nothing left for herself. Trampy sought out new tricks, invented balancing-feats, made her practise them, in the morning, on the stage, with his sleeves turned back and his trousers turned up, absolutely like a Pa. Lily, accustomed to yield obedience, relapsed under the yoke. Bike in the morning, bike at the matinée, bike in the evening ; and, with that, the cooking, the washing-up . . . and not a farthing in her pocket, though she had made a fortune for her Pa, damn it ! Pa living on his income at Kennington, while she continued her life of slavery ! Wasn't it enough to make her send everybody to the devil ; and Nunkie, that old rogue, with the rest ? A pack of nigger-drivers, that's what they were, every one of them ! And what an idiot she was, to keep on barking her shins for other people : would she go on doing it until she was fifty ? And, if she didn't begin now to put money by, who would do it for her later ? Not that

worthless husband, surely ! He, who, that very morning, had dared, the loafer, to tell her of a scheme, a risky trick which she was to perform, a thing calculated to break your head or make a millionaire of you : for him, of course, just as for Pa ! It had come to this, that her turn wasn't good enough, that it had to be more sensational ; and she was expected to make it so for a man she didn't love ! Oh, she had put him nicely in his place ! Rather ! Thank you for nothing : none of that for her ! In the evening, Lily was still trembling, with her two elbows on the table, as she sat facing her glass in her dressing-room ; angrily she crushed the grease-paint on to her cheeks, which were pale with rage. . . .

Ting ! Straight on to the stage, turning round and round, fifty rounds from habit, mechanically, without any "go" in them : an indolent performance, which would have earned her a good smacking in Pa's time.

"You were shockingly bad !" said Trampy, who was waiting for her in the bar, after watching her from the front. "What's the matter with you ? Are you ill ?"

Lily did not even answer.

"I'm speaking to you," said Trampy crossly. "You did nothing right to-night."

"Yes, I know ; that'll do," said Lily.

"It's not a question of 'Yes, I know,' but of doing better next time," said Trampy.

"I'm not taking any orders to-night, thank you," said Lily.

"No, darling, but there was an agent in the house. He must have thought you bad."

"That's none of your damned business !"

"And, if you don't get engagements, what's to become of us ?"

"I don't care a hang," said Lily. "*I* can always manage."

"*You ? . . . you ? . . .* And what about me ? We're married, aren't we ?"

"But the money I earn's mine," said Lily. "I mean to buy dresses . . . and whatever I want to . . . with *my* money. You'll be wanting to come on the stage next, in evening-dress, to stand over me while I do my turn, and getting out your belt. Do you take me for your daughter, tell me ?"

"What I'm saying," said Trampy, aghast, "is for your good, from the point of view of the business, the salary."

"*My* business, *my* salary, damn it !" cried Lily. "*Mine, mine*, do you understand ? And it concerns nobody but myself !"

### III

It came as a smack in the jaw to Trampy :

“ *My pay, my work, mine !* ”

It meant no more pocket-money with which to lord it at the bars. It meant a cheap cigarette instead of his glorious cigar. It was the end of a beautiful dream ; and the awakening was a hard one. At first, he hoped to make Lily jealous by going about openly with the stage-girls ; but she no longer paid any attention, seemed to suggest that he had better amuse himself on his side and she on hers :

“ What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander,” she said.

Lily would no longer take his orders ; and, because he felt his wife escape him, it was he, Trampy, who now became jealous. When, from a distance, among the tables, he saw Lily ride round the stage and all those heads raised towards her, those opera-glasses pointed at her, he followed her with an anxious eye. “ Miss Lily ! ” “ Miss Lily ” was his wife, after all ! Those rounded arms, that lissom figure, those twinkling legs were all his, every bit of them ! He was the husband, by Jove ! It was not a marriage for fun, as with Ave Maria : it was a marriage for good and all, which had cost him two pounds—“ Yes, siree ! ”—at the Kennington registry-office. And it wasn't only her flightiness, her smiles at the front boxes, but “ *my work, my salary, mine* ” into the bargain ! She was acting like a bad wife, forgetting her most sacred duties !

Lily stood on no ceremony with him, took her title of "Miss" seriously: very flattering for him, very flattering, he must say! He no longer knew himself: he, who, in the old days, used to answer, "My lord, rely on me!" when a half-tipsy swell invited him to come and drink champagne with some stage-girls, now became furious if men in the audience, not knowing who he was, sized up "Miss Lily" before him—her shoulders, arms and the rest—with reflections such as "I could do with a bit of that!" or "A nice little supper . . . and then!" He felt inclined to shout in their faces that she was no "miss," but his wife, by Jove!

He became more and more jealous. The thought of Jimmy, especially, kept running in his head. He felt a twitch whenever he heard him mentioned. And Jimmy was often mentioned just at present, for he was said to be preparing a new turn, a turn which would make him famous, unless it killed him.

"If only it would!" Trampy hoped.

Jimmy was Trampy's bugbear. He had flattered himself that he had snatched Lily from Jimmy by sheer prowess; and not a bit of it! The recollection of that drove him mad, the sense of his powerlessness exasperated him, he had but one idea left: to show Lily—and Jimmy—the sort of man he was; to take his revenge. That great scheme of his, that discovery which would prove what he was made of, the invention which he had patented in America with Poland's money—oh, she had revenged herself finely, had the Parisienne!—well, the time to apply himself to that trick had come. Lily had refused to do it. All right, he would do it himself!

But, if he was to succeed, it was necessary that Lily should supply him with money, more money, lots of money. The apparatus was incomplete and had probably got damaged in the London warehouse; it would need

repairs, improvements. Now Lily seemed intractable. She was vexed at having to earn money for two, pretended to have none too much for herself ; it was her costumes now : six sets of tights, one for each evening, pink, green, red, blue, grey, white, and assorted ornaments, silk ribbons. She didn't want to kill herself with work for nothing, as she had been doing up to now :

" A lady isn't a performing dog ! " she said.

Trampy swallowed his bitterness when he heard that. Lily was escaping him altogether. Sometimes, he would go on the stage, sit down in a corner and, from there, see Lily, a shawl over her shoulders, her throat wrapped in a scarf, walk up and down, behind the back-drop, like a passenger on the deck of a ship, at one time with a monkey-faced, red-whiskered sketch-comedian ; at others, according to the chances of the week, with the female-impersonator, the boy with the green eyes. There was no harm in that : they were at home, among themselves, Lily was no goody-goody lalerperlooser, he wouldn't have had her so. And Trampy did not dare say anything, for fear of being made a laughing-stock and also lest he should offend " Miss Lily." But he was tormented with jealousy, nevertheless, merely at seeing her talk pleasantly with her acquaintances. And yet it was innocent enough, a mere " Hullo, Lily ! " " Hullo, old boy ! " by way of keeping herself in touch with the news, for Lily hardly ever looked into *The Era* or *Das Program* ; all those names, all that competition frightened her !

She had learnt nothing new about Pa, except that the troupe still existed, but in quite a small way, of course. Her Pa was in favour of gentle treatment, now, so they said ; he had changed his manner.

" Too late ! " murmured Lily, thoughtfully.

But she was much amused when she heard that Tom, in addition to keeping up his trade as a shoe-black, was



learning boxing, with bull-dog obstinacy, in order to give Pa back his punch on the nose and beat him in a square fight. And didn't some one say that Tom was stage-struck, too? Tom—that dwarf—with his short arms, on the stage! Crazy! Crazy, every one of them!

And then they were always talking of Jimmy: Jimmy here, Jimmy there. It was becoming serious, Lily couldn't get over it. She wondered what old Martello would say, when he heard that: Jimmy an artiste! Pooh! Nonsense! And it was true, mind you! It was repeated from mouth to mouth, his fame was spreading, his fame, that is to say, in the bars, in the wings, among pros; you heard his name mentioned, together with a hundred others; but that already was a great deal, that one could say, Butt Snyders, Laurence, Jimmy, Marjutti, all mixed up, as though he were their equal, he who had done nothing! But he would "do," it was in the air: some stroke of luck, who could tell? And Lily knew him to be ambitious. Lady or no lady, she was an artiste first and foremost and hated competition. She had been whipped for her rivals, Lillian, Edith and Polly; had caught it for Laurence and for the fat freaks, too; and she depended on her work for her bread. When she saw a new troupe come to the front, it made her anxious: even children "that high," who played bike between the pillars of the stage, she felt inclined to stamp upon; and, if people ever asked her advice, she did not hesitate to tell them wrong. Men especially were disastrous competitors, even the ignorant ones. You never knew where you were with them, they dared do anything! She could not help getting mad when she thought of it. One more to take the bread out of her mouth! For it was all very well to treat Jimmy as a fool, to talk of his crotchets—he had views concerning a stage-apprentices' fund, a home of rest for superannuated artistes and so on—Lily considered him dangerous. He was not a silly

Glass-Eye or a stage-struck Tom ; he was an ambitious Jimmy. But, all the same, how absurd ! A hypocrite like that was fit to write to Pa and get a poor girl in trouble, but was not the man to risk his skin ! She laughed, not a stage smile, no, a real laugh, head thrown back, full-throated. An artiste, O lord ! Yes, like a heap of bluffers, who were to do this and that, all sorts of wonderful things, and who ended by making a laughing-stock of themselves ; the whole business was so childish, faked up with ropes and weights, nursery-toys, Punch-and-Judy rubbish. It would be just like that with Jimmy, sure : lots of noise and then . . . nothing ! And he would have lost his place as manager and he would starve, the josser : that would teach him to be spiteful ! And where *was* Jimmy ? He might be very clever, in his shed in London, swinging from his rope, like a monkey on a string ; but to do that before an audience was different. There would be no Jimmy left !

She liked to talk to herself like that. Miss Lily avoided thinking of a possible stroke of luck, she who had taken such pains to attain so little, just to become Mrs. Trampy, to have the honour of working for Trampy and feeding Trampy. Oh, she was tired of it, did all she could to find him work, to spur him on ! She even wanted him to practise. And she mentioned Tom and Jimmy to him, all those beginners, all the others who were coming on.

Trampy did not like to hear Jimmy named :

"She thinks more of him than of me," he said to himself.

And time passed and passed. It was now eight months that they had been travelling through Germany ; and then, at last, came Berlin, the centre of the agencies, like the plunge into Chicago, after the Western Tour ; or New York, after the Eastern ; or Paris ; or London. Lily asked herself for what part of the world she would sign contracts. She would have liked Australia, South Africa, the States,

so as to leave her husband in Europe, sitting up on his hind-quarters, like a trained dog, waiting for his missis to come back :

"If I could have the Kolossal in the meantime," Lily thought. "A month there would do me nicely! I'd like just to beat the fat freaks in their own country and to show Pa that I don't need his old troupe to star with!"

And Lily had some hope: an agent had given her to understand that she would be engaged, without a doubt, at that famous music-hall. But no! She learnt that the Kolossal was not wanting cyclists, it had an attraction for next month, something sensational, it was said. And, in fact, suddenly, in the space of a night, the walls of the capital were covered with huge posters—"Bridging the Abyss!"—at the Kolossal!

"What's that?" Lily asked herself.

And she was thunderstruck when she heard that this was Jimmy's new trick! She had no doubt left when, looking into a bookseller's window, she saw Jimmy's portrait in *Die Illustrierte Zeitung*.

Her arms fell to her sides. What, she thought, already? All this advertisement for Jimmy? She had lost the Kolossal because of him! Already Jimmy was taking the bread out of her mouth! She could have wrung his neck!

Never had the New Zealanders, or the Hauptmanns, or the Pawnees, or any one, or anybody known such advertising as that, except the great break-neck performers: Laurence, the Loopers, the Motor Girl; and even then the girl was packed up in her machine like a sausage. But "Bridging the Abyss," the papers said, required art: everything depended on the exact impetus, the faultless balance. The press was filled with clever puffs, biographies, descriptions of the apparatus, the cool daring which

it needed to try that without a rope, to risk the performer's life six times in six seconds. London and Paris were both said to have wanted the attraction ; and Berlin was to have it first : *hoch* for the Kolossal !

Trampy also was flabbergasted, when he read about all this :

" But . . . but . . . but it's my apparatus and nothing else ! Why, I patented it in America ! Do you understand now," he asked, without, however, entering into technical explanations, " do you understand now why I wanted you to help me ? It wasn't a question of the rusty bike ! You've made me miss fame and fortune ! And to think that I have an apparatus rotting away in London, in a warehouse, and that, if you'd listened to me, I should have been at the Kolossal by now . . . and covering you with diamonds ! "

" I like your style ! " said Lily. " You'd have made me break my back in your stead ! I know you ! "

" Oh, but I shan't swallow this," said Trampy, in his exasperation. " We shall see ! I have my rights. I shall enforce them ! "

" Don't make a fool of yourself," said Lily. " When a thing has to be done, it gets done without all that talk : look at Jimmy ! "

" Hang your Jimmy ! "

" It's not a question of *my* Jimmy," retorted Lily, " but of *my* money. I should simply have flung it away ! You do a thing like that ! You risk your skin ! Rot ! "

Trampy, in his rage, would have boxed Lily's ears, had it not been for her nails, which she held ready to scratch his face, and he went out fuming. He ran off to the agents, but there was nothing for him. And yet Trampy knew or, at least, supposed that they must want an opposition-show to " Bridging the Abyss." They must, surely ! Why, everywhere, in all the great centres, every music-

hall had its rival opposite or beside it : everywhere, each establishment strove to inflict empty houses upon its rival by offering finer "leg-shows" or more break-neck tricks. At the Kaiserin, the rival of the Kolossal, they were, without a doubt, looking for something to set against "Bridging the Abyss" and they had nothing, or else Trampy would have known it : among pros such matters were always known long beforehand. Oh, Trampy was prepared to do anything, even to breaking his neck, by Jove, to escape his wife's sarcasm !

And, one evening, behold Trampy returning in triumph to the café where Lily awaited him :

"I knew it !" he cried. "I knew it wouldn't go like that !"

"Well, what ?" asked Lily. "Have you got a number thirty-seven ? Thirty-eight ? A fresh conquest ? Something quite out of the common ?"

"Laugh away, Lily ! That son of a gun shall hear me talked about yet, by Jove ! And everybody else will, too. You must be prepared for anything, Lily, when you marry an artiste !"

"Why, what's happened ?" asked Lily, immensely surprised.

This had happened : the two music-halls had fought. Jimmy, who was unable, it seemed, to get London or Paris, had offered his "Bridging the Abyss" to the Kaiserin, but his price was considered too high. From there he went to the Kolossal and made the same proposal. Now, times were hard for the music-halls, sucked dry by the enormous salaries which they had to pay. The managers were standing shoulder to shoulder, in the presence of the common enemy the artiste and, more particularly, the originator of sensations, who is indispensable and who makes you an offer with a pistol at your head, like a highwayman demanding your money or your life.

But a turn like that meant an assured success ; and the Kolossal offered Jimmy five hundred marks a night, so as to spike the Kaiserin's guns by getting hold of a unique turn and one not easy to replace ; a piece of underhand work involving two months' empty houses at the Kaiserin, which, as it was, had only a second-rate troupe by way of "sisters," while at the Kolossal they had Roofers engaged by the year, real ones, the complete dozen, words and music guaranteed. And now the Kolossal would make huge money with "Bridging the Abyss" and sink its rival : it was a master-stroke. But they knew everything at the Kaiserin. The Kaiserin also wanted a "Bridging the Abyss." It would have one, a better one, with a finer title : "Arching the Gulf !" And they would get it for three hundred marks ! And they must be ready, quick, quick, before the Kolossal, and it was just possible : they had twenty days yet ; the apparatus would be made ; they knew the plans, the dimensions ; the house would be fixed up accordingly ; they must succeed at all costs and not let themselves be strangled without defence ! It was a struggle to the death ! They would fight with corpses, if need be ! Other people had broken their backs for them before now ; there would be no difficulty in finding one more to risk his life six times in six seconds for three hundred marks a night.

And it was at that moment that Trampy offered himself. They had heard his name :

"Trampy Wheel-Pad, the tramp cyclist with the red-hot stove ?"

"That's me," said Trampy.

And, full of self-assurance, he explained the object of his visit :

"I was the first to construct it ; I patented it myself at Washington ; I will produce the documents !"

It will be understood why Trampy wore his air of con-

quest when he returned home that day. He had his engagement in his pocket. He displayed it victoriously to Lily, passed it over her face, revelled in his revenge. At last he was going to show Lily whether he was able to keep a wife or not ; and champagne-suppers every evening, by Jove, with girls—no damned goody-goody lalerper-loosers—just to show her !

That same evening, he left for London, with an advance from the management, and came back to Berlin with the apparatus, the whole set up and repaired in a week, a gang of men working night and day. Followed practice with the rope, on a movable pulley, from early dawn, like a man determined to accomplish his break-neck feat, alive or dead ; for Trampy would have done no matter what for Lily to cease being " Miss " Lily, to admit herself married—married for love, not to escape whippings—to cease being ashamed of him, to show herself proud of him, on the contrary, especially before Jimmy !

Trampy, in his less enthusiastic moments, felt a certain uneasiness : Jimmy's proximity, his own patents far away, in America. But he put a bold face on it, declared himself the inventor, practised unrelentingly, with hatred of his rival in his heart. This hatred seemed to increase his powers of work. He practised, practised. He had a lively intelligence, if his heart was a trifle flabby. And he was very skilful besides, when he condescended to take the trouble. He was a quick worker : in less than twenty days everything was ready and " Arching the Gulf " sprawled over the hoardings of Berlin, side by side with " Bridging the Abyss." One saw nothing else ; and the Kaiserin opened its doors forty-eight hours before Jimmy. It was a huge success. Trampy received an ovation when, after the release of the terrible springs which flung the bike from one pedestal to another, in five seconds he fell on the mattresses outspread to receive him, behind a cloth.

It goes without saying that Jimmy was present at the show. He was smashed before he had even begun ! There, before his eyes, was his own invention worked by another ! He had expected competition, of course ; it was impossible, he knew, to discover anything that wasn't copied at once ; snatchers of ideas, who prowl around artistes, plagiarists, pirates swarmed as thick as any other sort of thieves. And, as ill-luck would have it, though his turn was difficult to perform, the apparatus, at least, was simple to construct : four powerful springs, screwed down with a jack, which the weight of the leaping cyclist, as he fell upon each pedestal, released one after the other, causing him to take enormous jumps forward. It was an ideal break-neck machine, easy to carry about ; only the calculations had been difficult. They had cost him a lot of trouble to establish ; and now another was profiting by them ! Perhaps some one had patented the invention before him. For he, too, before showing it in public, had patented it in England and Germany ; and his anger knew no bounds, his energy was increased fourfold when he learned the name of the plagiarist : Trampy again ! Trampy, who had stolen his love, who had stolen his Lily . . . and who was now stealing his idea . . . robbing him of the fruit of his labour ! Jimmy, in spite of his fury, resolved to keep calm : the law first. He was protected by the law, unless—and that was impossible—unless Trampy had had the same idea as himself before him and taken out his patents before the publication in *Engineering*. Jimmy showed a prompt decision, a feverish activity. First of all, he must put the law in motion, bring an action against Trampy, telegraph to the patent-office at Washington to ascertain the date. Meanwhile, he made his first appearance on the day fixed for it. His success was even greater than Trampy's ; his leaps were twice as wide, more in accordance with his courage. The way in which he “ bridged the abyss,” in the huge hall



where he gave his show, was enough to prove that he was the inventor, the creator, the great, typical, daring performer, who, disclaiming death, marches to glory and fortune even as heroes, flag in hand, rush to the assault under fire.

It was a bolt from the blue for the Kaiserin when the little paper arrived, the injunction against "Arching the Gulf." A steamer caught in a cyclone would undergo much the same disablement, under a sea sweeping her from stem to stern, swamping the saloons, drowning the very rats in the hold. Jimmy's active enquiries had not taken long: telegram followed upon telegram; the British consul woke up. The law at Washington was formal and precise: nothing could be patented that had been known, or used, or published before the patent was applied for. Now the article in *Engineering*, of course, appeared prior to the step taken by Trampy. And in Germany, also, Jimmy won his case; the court found in favour of the absolute novelty of the invention. The Kaiserin could not give its performance short of paying five hundred marks a night to its rival, the Kolossal. This meant the wreck of "Arching the Gulf;" and Trampy came down with it. For a few days, he led a terrible life, a desperate struggle, made efforts in every direction; but, at last, worried, hustled, driven to bay, Trampy disappeared into the darkness, while Jimmy, freed from this enervating opposition and feeling sure of himself henceforward, gained fresh courage, added another arch to "Bridging the Abyss."

It was done, he had made his start, he had a name, he was the man who draws crowds; he received brilliant proposals from all sides, from the Western Trust, among others. He felt himself somebody; and money also was coming in. He could at last realize what he had in his head . . . In the absence of love there would be fame . . . oh, something a thousand times more sensational than "Bridging the Abyss," more modern, more scientific,

something which he confided to nobody, which he kept locked up in his brain, in his heart, like a love-passion, a thing which would be his alone, this time, which no one could take from him ! For it would not be a question of a spring and a click only. The thing moved in his breast, lived in his brain. When he thought of it, his cheeks became hollow with ambition, his eyes lit up. He seemed to tower over immense perspectives ; and, from that height, Trampy appeared to him small, so small, so really small that he felt his anger decrease. And then there was Lily ! To send Trampy to his wife with a black eye or a bloody nose, to turn the husband into an object of ridicule to his wife, that was impossible for him ; it would have shown lack of respect for Lily, poor darling ; he would not humiliate her in her man ! She loved him, perhaps, in the illusion of her seventeen years ! Hurt *her* ? Never ! Jimmy wiped the episode from the slate ; hard as it was, he forgave that highway robber, in the name of his dead love.

Ah, if he could have seen Lily, when Trampy was driven to confess his discomfiture to her, Jimmy would have been revenged off-hand ! Lily seethed with rage against her husband, that footy rotter ! What ! Was that his great scheme ? Did he call that an idea ? How often had not Jimmy spoken to her about it ! It was pinned on the wall, it lay about in the Gresse Street workshop for months. She remembered seeing the plans, the diagrams, the drawings in the papers. Jimmy had explained everything to her, at the time when he was still a jossier. And Trampy had stolen it from him, stolen it, stolen it ! Oh, he would make her die of shame !

It was a terrible dispute, a real performance of *Humanity*, with threats, clenched fists, broken crockery strewn the floor.

"To humiliate me like that before Jimmy!" said Lily, furious.

"Drop that about Jimmy!" snarled Trampy, green with jealousy. "I won't have you mention him!"

"I shall mention him if I like! Jimmy is a son of a gun! Very well! But he's a man! He's worth two of you."

Trampy strode up to her with his fist raised.

"If you touch me," cried Lily, seizing the lamp, "if you touch me, I'll smash it over your head!"

#### IV

WHEN Trampy received the visit of the *Gerichtsdienner*, with the bill of costs to pay—for the Kolossal sued the Kaiserin for damages and the Kaiserin came down upon Trampy—when Trampy learnt that, he became a limp rag. Already he saw himself dragged before the courts, his whole past laid bare: two wives on his hands, for all he knew; Lily crushing him with her scorn; Jimmy triumphant.

Trampy had a moment of real despair. Lily preferred him like that, humbled at her feet. She seemed to understand her husband, a man spoilt by easy conquests, a boozier, a rake, who had taken too much upon himself when he wedded a wife. Trampy was certainly not made for marriage: having a wife was a different thing from having thirty-six girls. His heart, weakened with premature enjoyment, was no longer made for real love. All this he now perceived and, in spite of himself, realizing his unworthiness, felt overcome by an ever-increasing jealousy.

Those were melancholy weeks in the small room. He sat for hours brooding over his disgrace. Lily silently turned this time of rest to account and mended her costumes, sewed spangles on her bodices, beside the earthenware stove, on which the stew was simmering; and then came the meal, on the table hastily cleared of the mass of ribbons, thread and needles, to make room for the plates. Trampy choked as he swallowed that

dinner which he had not earned, sighed sadly for the good cheer of his dreams, the champagne-suppers with girls. He gulped down his meagre fare in silence, he who had known gay junketings, noisy laughter and "Roman nights!" To go from there and drown his sorrows in the bar next door was but a step. And Trampy had sorrows outside his recent defeat: sorrows which were even more bitter. He felt that, this time, he was losing Lily.

Lily was surrounded with sympathy. When she went the round of the agencies, the pros courted her. They looked upon Lily in the light of a wife tired of her husband. They prowled round that possible prey. A Lily was worth the having, meant an assured income for whoever succeeded in winning her affections and managing her properly: not with brutality, no, rather not; home joys, like Mr. Fuchs! Who was destined one day to own those full-blown seventeen summers, those twinkling legs, that lissom body, trained to go round and round, unerring and exact? What lucky dog would have her for himself, would succeed in making her love him? They pitied Lily openly, to disgust her with her husband and hasten on the catastrophe. Trampy? He was no husband for her! They? Ah, yes, now that was a different matter! And they talked of the dangers attendant upon Trampy's mode of life; the impersonator told her of the hideous disorders brought on by habits such as his; they exaggerated on purpose, amused themselves by frightening her; until Lily, sometimes, would look upon herself as a pretty little gazelle chained to a mangy bear.

Trampy suspected all this, having himself, in the old days, in the time of his glory, been one of those who hovered round wives ready for divorce, helping them, if need be. He could have smashed the face of that green-eyed impersonator. There was also that architect, that

theatre-builder, Kellermann's friend: he was passing through Berlin and Lily had taken his fancy, the other evening, at the café; he had patted her cheek gaily:

"I knew you when you were 'that high.' You used to sit on my knee. How beautiful you've grown!"

There appeared to be an infinity of people who had known Lily when she was "that high." They paid her more and more attention . . . and then they believed her to be looked after by Jimmy. That again was a friendship dating back to her childhood, they said: Jimmy, the bill-topper. He, too, had known her when she was "that high."

The greater part of this talk reached Trampy's ears. Oh, he could have killed Jimmy! But he was obliged to hold his tongue. Jimmy had him under his heel, with that crushing lawsuit. They did not even dare speak of it, so painful was the subject. The little table by the earthenware stove separated them like a wall; and there was one thing always between them: Jimmy. Trampy never mentioned his name now. He would have had too much to say. . . . And there were continual summonses, always; and lawyers, always; and costs, always. Money melted away like butter in the sun. Lily was tired of it; and an agony overcame her at the thought of leading a life like that for the rest of her days:

"Oh," she said, "he's taking the very bread from our mouths, with his lawsuit! And I haven't a decent hat to wear."

"He'll drive us to the workhouse," grumbled Trampy, staring before him, with folded arms.

"It's your fault!" Lily began, but soon stopped: the subject led to a surfeit of quarrelling.

But, in her own mind:

"That son of a gun of a Jimmy!" she thought. "All

the same, who would ever have believed it of him ? Can he guess that all of this falls upon me ? ”

“ Suppose you were to go and see him,” said Trampy, at his wits’ end, one day when he had exhausted himself in stormy explanations with the manager of the Kaiserin.

“ I go and see Jimmy ? ” exclaimed Lily. “ What for ? ”

“ To try and arrange things,” replied Trampy, dropping his head. “ No one but you could. . . .”

“ I’ll think about it, I’ll see,” said Lily.

But she had to get used by degrees to the idea of going and seeing that Jimmy who was now ruining her. A strange curiosity, nevertheless, drove her towards this conqueror, once a bike-cleaning workman, who was now topping the bill at Berlin and making as much money by himself as a whole programme put together. He would receive her kindly, she was sure of that. Oh, then she wanted to tell him that she had had nothing to do with that business of the patents . . . that she did not approve of Trampy’s conduct. . . . and then he could give her news of Pa and Ma, as he had come from London, where he must have seen them ! And she was dying to know. The idea was increasing with her that life with Trampy had become impossible. And, in case she should leave him, she dreaded finding herself alone. Already there were all those offers being made to her, a married woman, driving her mad ! She, Lily Clifton, was treated like a “ Parisienne : ” she hated that sort. To walk about the stage, in couples, might pass ; but it was possible to go too far, like the conductor of the orchestra, who, the other day, tried to kiss her in her dressing-room, married woman though she was. Then what would it be when she travelled alone ? On the continent, too ! Oh, she would have loved to be a good little wife ! But, as that could not be, better go back to her Pa and Ma and have a home, a real one, with a servant in it. She was

yearning for a home. But how would she be received in that case? Would they put the blame on her? Had they forgiven her? Had she a Pa and Ma still? That was what she wanted to know.

Lily would have liked to look handsome and elegant on the day when she went to Jimmy, so as to show him that he was not the only one who made a lot of money; but she felt very small and terribly excited. The hotel itself, the great clock, the waiters, everything made an impression on her, so different from her boarding-house in the Akerstrasse. She felt like running away after knocking at his door; and Jimmy opened it with the preoccupied air of a man disturbed at an inconvenient moment. But suddenly he put out his hand in hearty greeting:

"Hullo, Lily! Come in."

Lily entered a bright sitting-room, neatly furnished with a sofa and comfortable chairs—no bed—a room which served only for that. She at once felt more at her ease. Jimmy motioned her to a seat near a table covered with papers, full of marks and signs which she did not understand, and books, rulers and compasses. She tried to be simple and dignified; apologized for interrupting him in his work:

"Brain-work, I see," she said, pointing to the papers. "That's hard, too, I suppose," she added, to say something, for a start, like talking about the weather.

"A matter of habit, like the bike," said Jimmy, in a tone of persuasion. "Sit down, Lily, there, in that big arm-chair; you're not disturbing me."

"'K you," said Lily, sitting down, feeling reassured by his welcome and thinking that, at least, he was polite.

"I am glad to see you again, Lily," Jimmy went on, taking a chair himself. "Always glad to see you. And how are you? Keeping well?"



"'K you," said Lily.

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Jimmy, scrutinizing Lily with great kindness and trying not to see her pre-occupied expression. "I know what brings you here, Lily. You're a dear little thing, a kid, eh? A real kid at heart, aren't you? I bet you I guess. I've just come from London. You want to hear the latest news of your Pa and Ma, eh? You're not angry with them, I hope? Oh, it would be wrong of you to be angry with them still! They're very fond of you, you know. They cried when you went away, Lily. Your . . . going away," Jimmy insisted, with a quaver in his voice, "was . . . a great blow . . . to them . . . too."

"How do they get on without me?" asked Lily, eagerly, not wishing to break down and cry before Jimmy. "Poor Pa! Yes, he was fond of me. He never let me fall on purpose. He did not force me to work when I was ill."

"Your Pa!" Jimmy broke in, glad of the chance to give a fresh turn to the conversation. "Why, there's no harm in him, damn it: your Pa's an artiste in love with his art, that's all! I shouldn't be surprised if the troupe made a hit yet. It's had a success of a sort already—in the small halls—at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. Your Pa just does without you as well as he can. He runs after his pupils all day long, damn it!" said Jimmy, with a laugh. "Your cousin stars."

"Who stars?" asked Lily.

"Your cousin Daisy. She came, as soon as you . . . as you went away, and offered to take your place. Pa Clifton sent her to the right-about, treated her like a . . . like an I don't know what, but she returned to the charge. She's doing very well now. She tries to be like you."

"No! Impossible!" exclaimed Lily. "What, that fat freak?"

"And your Pa will succeed," Jimmy hastened to add.

"You'll see. You ought to be proud of having a Pa like that."

"Yes, in a sense," said Lily, who felt a certain satisfaction at being the daughter of her Pa.

He was a bit harsh at times, but a man like her Pa, or like Jimmy, was better than her loafer of a tramp-cyclist!

"And . . . Ma?" asked Lily.

"Your Ma," said Jimmy, in a lower voice, "cried . . . oh, how she cried when she found that you had gone! No doubt, she exaggerated any wrong she had done you. It seems she fell upon her knees and prayed and asked for forgiveness."

"Forgiveness? What for? Of whom?"

"Why," said Jimmy, in a serious tone, "of whom do you think people ask forgiveness, when they are alone, on their knees?"

"Oh," said Lily, greatly touched, "I understand! So they didn't put the blame on me?"

"What blame?"

"For my marriage," said Lily, lowering her eyes.

"No . . . if you had gone off to live with him . . . oh, not you, not you, I know!" protested Jimmy, seeing a gesture of Lily's. "But marriage is different, I suppose. You had the right, you were old enough to go away with the man you loved."

Jimmy turned pale as he said this; but Lily, hanging her head and red with shame, did not notice it.

"What!" said Jimmy. "You're blushing! Do you regret it?"

Lily did not reply.

"Then," continued Jimmy slowly, "what they said—I wouldn't believe it, but you know they say a lot of things—is it true?"

She nodded yes and raised her eyes to him with a sad, weary smile.

"He doesn't love you? And . . . and . . . you, Lily," asked Jimmy, taking her hand in his, "don't you love him?"

"Certainly not!" said Lily, with such an accent of conviction and such a look of disgust that Jimmy was, at one and the same time, delighted to the bottom of his heart and pained to the verge of tears.

Poor Lily! He now noticed her pallor, the dark rims round her eyes, that exquisite face refined by inmost grief. Lily, upon whom, since her visit to the shop in Gresse Street, he had built his hopes of happiness! It seemed to him like yesterday and already it was the distant past. Was that what her rebellion, her bid for freedom had ended in? Was that the crowning point of her hard life? Lily, fashioned to be the companion of a loving heart, was the prey of a footy rotter! Oh, if Jimmy had not controlled himself, if he had not clenched his teeth, for fear of talking! If he had listened to his anger, let loose the storm that raged within him, shouted out what he felt! But what would be the good of telling her his love? Why add to Lily's sorrows by letting her know what might have been and thus cause trouble in her household, when he wished for one thing only, Lily's happiness? Suppose she did not love her husband: Trampy, alas, unworthy though he was, remained her husband, nevertheless! And there was no hope of breaking the chain. The letters from Denver and Houston were anything but encouraging. No proofs, no recollections of Trampy's marriage over there. So there seemed no way out.

Nor did he wish to incense Trampy's jealousy. Lily would have had to bear the brunt of it . . . as in the old days, with Ma's temper. Oh, there was no doubt about it: Jimmy, to hold his tongue now, needed more courage than when risking his life six times in six seconds!

But what was the use of fighting against fate? Better submit, when there was no remedy, and strive for peace.

"Everything gets straight sooner or later," Jimmy went on. "Many lives that once seemed spoilt have become quite endurable. Time is the great healer. Trampy, no doubt, will get over his faults. He will learn to appreciate you. Have patience. Don't exaggerate your bothers, Lily. There are others unhappier than yourself. You have a claim to happiness. You will know it yet. Just think: you're so young, you have all your life before you!"

"The fool!" thought Lily. "It's easy for him to talk. But then . . . why was he so jealous? Why did he tell Pa about me? But for him, I should be at home now!"

It was certain that, notwithstanding his kindly reception, Jimmy now seemed to be taking Trampy's part, as formerly he had sided with Pa and Ma. And he was goody-goody lalerperlooser enough to ask Lily if her husband knew that she had come to see him:

"I hope he knows, Lily. We must have no secrets: did you tell him?"

"He sent me," she said, resolving to tell everything candidly, since that was what she had come for and not, after all, to talk about love, but about money, only, and business: it was a question of bread and butter to her.

"Ah! He did!" said Jimmy, a little surprised.

"Yes," said Lily; "it's about that lawsuit."

"Speak quite frankly, Lily. Tell me everything," said Jimmy, very calmly.

"Well," said Lily, yielding, "Trampy is at the end of his tether; he has no money"—she coloured up to the eyes—"no money, no work; the law-costs . . ."

"And whose fault is that?" interrupted Jimmy, rising and picking up a cigarette, so as to have something to

fumble at with his fingers. "Whose fault is it, Lily, if not that . . . well, if not Trampy's? Isn't it fair that he should pay for it? It would really become too easy, else, to steal other people's ideas! You know quite well, Lily—you saw it at my place, on the wall—is it my invention or is it not? And here comes Trampy," he continued, crunching up his cigarette with a nervous gesture, "and patents it . . . as if it were his own. It's a bit too much, you know!"

"Jimmy," cried Lily, starting up from her chair, "I swear to you that I had nothing to do with it! If I had known, Jimmy, I would have stopped it! I call it stealing, as you do."

"Oh, I'm quite sure of that, Lily! I never thought it was you! Calm yourself; sit down, do," said Jimmy, relieved at the sight of Lily's indignation, as she stood before him with blazing eyes and her face crimson with shame.

"Important tricks like that!" went on Lily, sitting down again. "No, those have no right to be copied. It's brain-work. You designed it yourself."

"Yes, but about the present," said Jimmy, with a serious air. "I can't give in to Trampy. I'm bound to defend myself. You came to see me about my action, Lily. I can't say anything on the subject. It's Trampy's business, I suppose! Why, what would you do in my place, Lily?"

"I should do as you're doing, Jimmy; you're perfectly right," said Lily, very low, without raising her head. "But couldn't one come to terms . . . avoid a lawsuit . . . and not waste all that money on jossers? What do you gain by it yourself? We can't pay up, Jimmy: those costs are breaking us."

"What do you mean by 'us'?"

"Trampy isn't working," continued Lily. "He hasn't done anything for a long time."

"But then," asked Jimmy, stopping in front of her, "how does he live?"

"I . . . I'm earning the money," explained Lily, blushing, ashamed to own her distress.

Oh, it was hard for her, Lily Clifton, to have no money and to confess it to Jimmy, that josser, who was making his five hundred marks a day! Jimmy saw her before him, huddled in her chair . . . her faded hat, her mean gown. He took in everything at a glance. Poor Lily, who used to dream of dresses, to be reduced to that! Then he understood. Pity moved him at the sight of that poor Lily. It was all very well for him to say, just now, "Business is business," and to ask, "What would you do in my place?" He knew what he would do. A lawsuit was not a question of sentiment, everybody knew that; but still, it was no longer between men . . .!

"Listen, Lily," he said, putting his hand kindly on her shoulder, "if all this is to fall upon you, we must see how we can arrange matters. Sorry you didn't come sooner. I don't want to add to your burdens, Lily, heaven knows I don't! I never thought of that. I ought to have suspected, perhaps. However, I will withdraw the case. I'll manage. And the costs . . . well, I'll pay them myself, if necessary, for you, Lily, for you; because I knew you when you were 'that high' . . . no, not quite so small; how old were you? Thirteen . . . and such a little thing, such a dear little wee thing. Do you remember when I made night and day in your cabin, by just touching my levers? And then it seems to me that I always knew you: in Mexico, in India, in South Africa, at the time of the elephants and the tiny birds. And then later, that other Lily, the London one: the one of only a few months ago. The one for whom . . ." continued Jimmy, in a voice smothered with emotion. "The Lily of Rathbone Place. The Lily of Gresse Street. That little

toque, which suited you so well and which you complained of . . . you poor little Lily ! . . . You poor silly little thing ! There, go home now and make your mind easy, as far as I'm concerned, Lily. None of your troubles shall come from me. Besides, as they say, a bad settlement is better than the best lawsuit. I'm doing it for your sake. Well, is that all right ? ”

“ Oh, how kind you are ! ” she said, raising her eyes to him, with a tear in them. “ Why, Jimmy, you're not so bad, after all ! ”

“ Pooh ! ” said Jimmy, lighting a cigarette. “ I'm no better than most, Lily, and no worse. Flesh and blood, like the rest. And, besides, for you, for you, Lily. . . . If ever you need me, Lily, if ever I can be of any use to you. . . . ”

“ For me,” thought Lily, as she returned home, “ for me. Ah, if I had known ! Ah, when I think that he, too, wanted to marry me . . . what a fool I was ! ” she said, with a sigh.

She still felt in her own palm the gentle, manly pressure of Jimmy's hand. She still heard the kind words with which he had comforted her on the threshold. Goodness, how happy she would have been with a man like him ! Her ill-will disappeared. He was no longer a cur, that damned josser, but a gentleman, rather, a brother, a friend. . . . And she was proud, also, that Jimmy, who was so busy and making such a lot of money, had promised to come and applaud her, one of these evenings, at her theatre, at Klein's Garden, before his own turn at the Kolossal. Oh, wouldn't she work hard that night ! She would do all her tricks ! She was bent on pleasing him. And how vulgar and common Trampy appeared in comparison ! However, there was no help for it now ; and Lily hastened home to bring him the good news. . . . In

any case, Trampy would be grateful to her for what she had done for him. As a matter of fact, it had cost her an effort to go and pay this visit.

She happened to run up against Trampy coming out of the bar, where, according to his custom, he had been drowning his cares. He had a moment of delight on learning the result of the visit, but, mad with jealousy, at once adopted a lofty tone, so as not to have to thank her :

"I knew he would knuckle under!" he said, without looking at Lily. "The braggart! He prefers a settlement, eh? And quite right too! He knows he's in the wrong. He's retreating, he's afraid."

"Afraid of what?" asked Lily, bewildered.

"Afraid of me. He knows it won't pay to try my patience too far!"

"Afraid? *Jimmy*?" said Lily, indignant at all that foolery. "Do you think he's done that because he's afraid?"

"And for what other reason would he have given in so soon?"

"He did it to please me, he did it for *me*, damn it, for *me*!" said Lily. "You're rid of your lawsuit: you ought to talk differently and thank me!"

"And why should he do it to please you? What is there between you?" asked Trampy, looking her in the face.

"You're drunk!" said Lily, furiously, with her hand ready to scratch.

"No scenes in the street!" said Trampy. "We'll go into this at home. . . ."

"Then I shan't come in!" said Lily, abruptly turning her back on him. "I'm going to the theatre!"

She had nothing to do on the stage; only the idea of being alone in the room with Trampy seemed intolerable to her. At the least discussion, Lily felt she would have



thrown the lamp at his head, so great was her indignation at his insolence !

She was boiling over with anger when she reached the theatre. There were people practising ; it was the time for it. Lily went up to her dressing-room, shifted things in her trunk, anyhow, for something to do. The idea that her husband thought her capable of anything wrong made her angry. Oh, to get a divorce, to part from him ! As this could not go on for ever, it might as well be done at once ; but it would be better if there were no fault on her part. A divorce, yes ; but with the honours on her side ; a divorce in her favour ! Patience, the opportunity would come ! It ought to be quite easy, with the girls whom Trampy beguiled, the love-letters which he received, to catch him in the act, cover him with ridicule, get the best of him. Oh, if she only could ! To be a poor little victim, how touching ! A dear little outraged wife !

“ You fool, if I catch you ! ” she said.

Then another idea passed through her brain. Oh, if it were true ! She would have danced for joy ! Trampy’s marriage in America :

“ Is it true ? Is it true ? God above, grant that it be true ! ”

It was possible. Already, a few days before, the Jim Crows who hovered around her had talked about it, in covert words, in the hope of making things worse. There must be some truth in it. There was so much news going from mouth to mouth : Lillian, Edith and Polly were the rage in Chicago. . . . That poor boy-violinist : at Budapest, the stuffed seat to his trousers had slipped from its place and allowed the dogs’ teeth to reach the living flesh ; he had had to spend a week in bed with poultices. . . . Kellermann was contemplating a theatrical trust on the Continent, planning a model music-hall in Paris. . . . There were Jimmy’s successes, his ambitions. . . . Amid

all this news, to which Lily listened, sometimes absent-mindedly, sometimes with interest, among these adventures dating from everywhere—names which she greeted like old acquaintances, with a little nod : “ Denver ? Yes, I know ; a big flat stage. . . . Mexico ? I remember ! ”—among all those tales, Lily pricked her ears when she heard the name of Ave Maria coupled with Trampy’s. She had a vague recollection of Ave Maria’s flight, after her departure from Mexico : was it with Trampy ? Were they really married then ? Oh, if it were only true ! God above, grant that it be true !

Lily, haunted by this idea of a divorce which would set her free, had rummaged in Trampy’s trunk, among his programmes and posters. It was full of letters, photos of girls in outrageous hats, in tucked-up skirts, in tights, with inscriptions. All these dated back to before the marriage, a collection of treasures which he had not had the pluck to destroy. She had hoped to find some proof, some clue ; but no, there was nothing serious in it. Lily did not give up, for all that ; on the contrary, after the visit to Jimmy, which made Trampy so meanly jealous, she lost no opportunity of enquiring. But Martello himself, the father, never had news of his daughter . . . hadn’t heard for ever so long ; and it was to no avail that Lily kept asking others about Ave Maria, the one who ran away with a man, a great artiste ; she always received the same reply :

“ Ave Maria ? Don’t know the name. . . . Ave Maria ? Haven’t seen her since. . . . ”

But Jimmy, always ; Jimmy here, Jimmy there ; they talked about him all the time : his ideas ; something new he had invented ; something no one had ever seen : much cleverer than “ Bridging the Abyss,” it seemed, but nobody knew what.

“ I know ! ” said Lily, with a well-informed air and very proud of knowing Jimmy and of letting people think. . . .

"Do you know Jimmy?"

"Ever since I was that high," answered Lily. "He used to hold me on his knees."

"And what is his new trick?"

"I'm not allowed to tell. He asked me not to say."

Everybody praised her for her discretion. The sympathy with which she was surrounded increased.

"Jimmy," they hinted. "Now there's a fellow you ought to have married, instead of your . . ."

"Not a word against my husband," she said, like a good and devoted little wife. "I won't have him insulted."

That did not prevent her from laughing with her friends. She felt a need of forgetting, or she would have died of boredom, with a husband like that. She was heavy at heart, sometimes. She was a woman, not an icicle. She felt herself made for love. She was flesh and blood, like Jimmy. She would have liked some one to console her, to talk softly to her, as Glass-Eye Maud used to do, in the warm bed. There were plenty willing to play the part of Glass-Eye Maud, no doubt: the female-impersonator, for instance, with the green eyes. Oh, she would have liked to be hugged, kissed full on the mouth, or else stroked and petted gently! No home, no happiness; marriage without love: that was her life henceforth. Those stage friendships were a relief.

The Bambinis romped with her. She loved their gaiety, liked to touch their sturdy little limbs. That evening, Lily, who was ready for her performance early, was having fun with them. Dressed in her pink tights, she looked like a blithe nymph playing with rollicking cupids.

"What a charming group!" said a voice behind her. "If I were a painter, Lily, I would do you like that!"

It was Jimmy, who had come to see her on the stage, as he had promised.

"Am I spoiling your game?" he asked. "It's so pretty! It makes me want to kiss the lot of you!"

"Well, boobey!" said Lily, all excited and laughing. "Why don't you? You daren't!"

"I daren't! I'll show you whether I dare . . . and . . . I'm stronger than I look!"

And thereupon he caught hold of Lily and lifted her like a feather—Lily, all taken aback, had not time to say "Oof!" so great was her surprise—and Jimmy crossed the whole stage with Lily in his arms, shouting to the manager:

"Look what a dear little baby I've found! Isn't she sweet, eh?"

And then, in the wings, he gave her a good big kiss on the cheek before putting her down.

The people around them laughed, applauded that stage joke:

"Jimmy, her old friend," they said. "Knew her when she was that high."

Lily was very proud of it. And, a few minutes after, when he had left her to take a seat in front, Lily jumped into the saddle and rode round and round, without a hitch, smiling to the audience, smiling to Jimmy in a front box, Jimmy to whom she was grateful for coming to see her: a famous bill-topper putting himself out for her . . . before everybody! She was faultless, that evening, did a dozen twirls on the back-wheel, made a record, was grand.

Trampy, meanwhile, was waiting for Lily outside, in the passage leading to the stage-door. He had not seen Jimmy kiss Lily, but he saw him carry her across the stage, just as he was coming on himself, and had turned back and hurried out to avoid scandal, giving way to his wife, who worked while he did not. He had gone out at once—time to run to the bar and drown two or

three sorrows—and was waiting for her now, without paying any attention to the girls passing. As soon as he saw Lily, he seized her by the arm :

“ I’ve had enough of this,” he said. “ I saw you, you and your Jimmy ! You can’t deny it this time ! ”

“ Oh, Trampy, don’t insult me like that ! ” protested Lily. “ Why do you always say ‘ my ’ Jimmy ? One can have a laugh and a joke on the stage without meaning wrong, you know one can. Besides, if you didn’t like to see him carry me in his arms, you ought to have smashed his face, without so much talk.”

“ I didn’t want to make a fuss.”

“ You were afraid to. You’re afraid of him, that’s what you are ! ”

“ Stop jeering at me ! ” said Trampy, shaking her arm violently. “ You’re dragging me in the mud ; it’s like those whippings of yours ! I’m tired of the affronts you put upon me ! You ought to have married your Jimmy and left me in peace.”

“ I can’t say,” sneered Lily, “ that I remember running after you ! ”

“ Your Jimmy ! ” repeated Trampy. “ I’ll kill that fellow like a dog ! If I don’t do it now, I will later, in a year, in a hundred years, if necessary. I’ll kill him like a dog ! ”

Lily gave a little laugh as she went out, followed by Trampy. She did not wish, in that lobby, before the people passing, to look like a woman insulted by her husband. She laughed bravely, as she used to, on the stage, with Ma, in the days of the great smackings. To see her laugh, one would have thought that Trampy was telling her a story ; and he repeated :

“ I’ll kill him like a dog—like a dog ! ”

“ Pooh ! ” said Lily, who knew Trampy. “ You talk too much to act.”

"We shall see. Where's your Jimmy hiding?"

"You'd be nicely caught, if you met him," said Lily, who had just noticed Jimmy leaving the music-hall to go to the Kolossal. "There he is, behind you."

"What's that? Don't you try to get at me!" said Trampy.

"I tell you, he's behind you, damn it! Turn round and see for yourself . . . if you have eyes to see with."

Trampy turned round, half-reluctantly: he didn't like those jokes, but he didn't wish to seem afraid.

"Where? Where do you see Jimmy?" he grumbled.

"There, in front of you," insisted Lily, pointing with her finger and pushing him by the shoulder. "Off you go!"

There was no drawing back. He marched straight up to Jimmy, who did not even recognize him and who stopped politely. But Trampy had time for reflection, no doubt: a clearer perception of professional brotherhood. Better, after all, to remain friends . . . among artistes. And, when he stood before him:

"H'm, h'm. Have you got a light about you, Jimmy? Give us a match," said Trampy, taking a cigar from his pocket.

## V

It stifled Lily, for the moment. She would rather have received twenty "contracts" with the steel buckle than see that cowardice in her husband. She had her Pa's blood in her, damn it !

"What !" she thought. "He believes me to misconduct myself with Jimmy and he is too much of a coward to object !"

But there was nothing to be done. Trampy was as incapable of anger as of love. All those years of a low life had degraded him to that point. And Trampy had even lost the right to bear Jimmy a grudge, made as though he had forgotten everything, said that, after all, it was much better to be friends. And all this under Lily's critical eye !

Jimmy ! To be obliged to look pleasant at Jimmy gave him a lump in his throat. Fortunately, he had the others, the crowd of assiduous pros who thronged round his wife. Against those he gave free scope to his jealousy and showed himself as strict with the rest as he had been accommodating with Jimmy. He meant to keep an eye on his wife :

"A married woman, on the stage, alone ! I won't have any more of that !"

He hit upon a contrivance to be always with her : he would be her "comic." It was a new system which had come into fashion : the most plastic performances spoilt by the juxtaposition of their caricatures ; acrobats, Olym-

pian gods, parodied by a merry-andrew in a ridiculous get-up: just as though Nunkie Fuchs, for instance, had taken it into his head to appear with his Three Graces and mimic their tricks, kicking about at the end of a wire with his fat, fatherly paunch and his round, silly face.

And Trampy, riding behind Lily, would simply give a parody of her tricks; it meant little work to him and was as good a way as another of going on the stage with her and establishing his title to *her* work and *her* salary. . . .

And off they went again, with the basket trunk, and the bikes; and, on the stage, every night, Lily, naked as a goddess, and Trampy, dressed in rags, went through their tricks and smiled . . . : applause for her, always; none for him, ever. Lily wore a very sad look in consequence, when they returned to the wings: a poor little wife, so sorry for her husband; but she triumphed at the bottom of her heart, while Trampy turned green with spite. He was furious with Lily; tried to make her fall, pushed her in turning; but Lily was too clever and sat as firmly on her bike as Ave Maria walked her slack-wire, when the brother used to shake it on purpose, whip in hand and snarling as if to bite.

Oh, if Lily had not made efforts to be a good little wife! Trampy was becoming unbearable. She posed as the poor little thing, despised, deceived and betrayed by her husband; she loved to hear people tell her so, called them to witness and continued, but without result, to make enquiries about Ave Maria.

And there were everlasting scenes at home. Lily had enough of it, more than enough of it! She had even decided to go away, to return to London; but, worn out with worry, she had to take to her bed, with a fever. It was the finishing stroke: no work, all the savings gone. . . .

Trampy, fortunately, found an engagement:

"It's all right; the neighbours will look after you," he



said, as he took his leave. "A man's duty is to see that his wife doesn't starve, eh, darling? I'm going to make money, too, and I'll bring you heaps when I come back; and I'll send you some. That's the sort of man I am. I don't talk of '*my money*!'"

Lily was left alone, in Berlin.

Generally, she hated the hotels frequented by artistes, but she was very glad to be in one this time. She, poor little broken-down thing, was not left to the care of a common servant, had nice, kind nurses, had no lack of friends who—very sincerely, for she was a favourite with them all—took an interest in that pretty Miss Lily, who would soon be free. . . .

Lily allowed herself to be coddled. Pending the arrival of the money which Trampy was to send, she wanted for nothing, especially in the way of luxuries: chocolates, sweets, flowers, they brought her everything. Her friends passing through Berlin, the impersonator, the Paras, many others, hearing that she was ill, came to see her, treated her as a lady, cried out how well she was looking, how pretty she was and how it suited her to be ill in bed.

Lily thought that very nice, put on a languid air, like a poor little jaded thing that had got out of gear:

"I shall die of overdoing it, I know I shall," she said. "I've been at the bike ever since I was that high"—raising her hand twelve inches above the bed—"and my heart's worn out by the hard work. My knees, too. Sit down there on the basket trunk. You at the foot of the bed. Have a chocolate."

Then she turned over in her sheets, which moulded her firm, plump shape, took a bag of sweets from the chair beside her and offered it round. Poor little martyr, she had been forbidden them by the doctor, because of her cough! But she took them all the same, merely for the

sake of taking them, with a graceful movement, her bare arm outstretched, her slender wrist making a supple curve, like a swan's neck, as she dipped her pretty hand into the bag.

In addition to her regular friends, such as the impersonator or the Paras, others, the people staying in the hotel, would tap discreetly at the glass door between her room and the passage, come in on tiptoe, speak in a whisper.

"What nonsense!" Lily would say. "I'm not dead yet, you know!"

And she laughed and—"Ugh! Ugh!"—a cough or so, a matter of lifting her embroidered handkerchief to her mouth, a favourite gesture. And there were stories from all parts, the cackle of the profession. The Paras were "living together" now, as they explained to her. The parrots? No go; given them up; one had its neck wrung by a monkey in Chicago; another died of consumption at Stockholm; the rest of the troupe sold to the stage-doorkeepers of the different variety-theatres. His sight was beginning to fail. She wanted smartness; she wasn't—how should he put it? The man looked for a word—she wasn't "Tottie" enough. However, they managed somehow, as "eccentric duettists." Lily thought that very nice, those two talents combined, very original; but could they give her any news of Ave Maria . . . a great artiste on the wire? . . .

If ever Lily might have hoped to receive news of Ave Maria, it was during this illness, from the artistes who visited her, on their way from anywhere to God knows where. Lily had news of everybody: of Mirzah, the white elephant, who had to be pole-axed for killing his keeper; of Captain North's seals; of the Three Graces, who were doing triumphantly in England; of Poland, the Parisienne, now starring with Bill and Boom. Tom

was talked about : biceps like thighs, now ; a hornpipe danced on the hands. She had news of the Pawnees, of the Hauptmanns. Roofer was sending out four new troupes, to Canada, Australia, India, Cape Colony : the Greater-England Girls. She had news of the New Zealanders and of her cousin Daisy, who seemed to find the star business jolly hard work :

“ The wind-bag ! ” said Lily.

They talked of Jimmy, of dogs, cats and monkeys, and of Tom Grave and Butt Snyders, those great break-neck acrobats : they talked of one and all, but not a word of Ave Maria. They knew her by reputation, as one who had been through the mill, more than Lily had, as Lily modestly admitted.

“ Darling,” said the impersonator affectionately, “ don’t bother about that Ave Maria of yours. I’m jealous. ‘ Be mine, darling ! How well we two should get on together, eh, Lily ? ’ ”

“ Hands off ! ” said Lily. “ Be good . . . there . . . like that . . . down by your sides . . . or you’ll get a smacking ! ”

Concerts were got up for Lily’s amusement. Sketch-comedians pulled their faces ; a musician twanged his banjo. At other times, by closing her eyes, Lily could have imagined herself in an aviary : the Whistling Wonder imitated the nightingale, the thrush, the lark. Another, an equilibrist, showed her how, when he was obliged to stay in bed with a broken leg and had nobody to wait on him, he used to wait on himself by going round the room on his hands . . . like that. Lily was given, for nothing, a performance which was worth a whole music-hall programme. To put everybody at their ease, Lily told them to smoke, took a puff or two at a cigarette herself—“ Ugh ! Ugh ! ”—almost choked . . .

They amused themselves, among themselves, free from

any constraint due to the presence of jossers. Lily joked with them as she used to do with the apprentices in the mornings, when they showed one another their bruises of the day before. She made them look at her "pigeon-egg," on the side of her foot, the little ball-shaped muscle special to her profession, like the triceps of the pugilist or the dancing-girls' calves. She was vain enough to put on a silk stocking, poked out her foot from under the bed-clothes, let them feel "her egg," made it jump under their fingers by a sudden contraction.

"Is that all you've got to show us, darling?" asked the impersonator.

"You don't want much, I *don't* think!" said Lily, pulling back her foot under the quilt.

The incident was interrupted by new-comers who had also known Lily when she was "that high." They brought fresh news from Lisle Street. They had had a drink with P. T. Clifton himself, had had a drink with an author who was writing a book on the business.

"Another josser who's sure to talk a lot of nonsense!" cried Lily. "If only they told the truth and described us as we are, a sight better than the society ladies, who come and wait for pros outside the stage-door!"

And they went on. The healths they had drunk with this girl and that girl; and new turns; competitors who were cropping up . . . names . . . names. . . . Ave Maria? Dead, they said: somewhere in Ecuador or Peru.

Then Lily stretched herself to her full length in the sheets, feeling weary, weary, crushed under all that talk.

And Trampy just didn't write, sent no money at all. She blushed for him . . . in spite of her wish to catch him tripping, before witnesses. She was ashamed to be his wife, his one and only wife, his little wife for good.

On that day, as it happened, Jimmy came to pay her a visit. His engagement at the Kolossal was ending.

He was to perform at the London Hippodrome, before going to the States. A certain air of respect surrounded him from the moment he entered the room: that Jimmy who already stood higher than any of them among the famous bill-toppers! And they gradually retired, as though Lily would prefer that. It was no use her saying:

“Do stay!”

They went all the same; and Lily was left alone with him, a little embarrassed and yet flattered at being thought on such good terms with Jimmy. As for him, he had just heard about Lily's illness, Trampy's absence, and hurried to see her, bringing her the good news that the lawsuit was over. Trampy would have nothing more to pay.

From that day, Jimmy was sometimes seen at Lily's. He spoke little, sat down on the basket trunk, listened, thought of things. He was known to have his mind full of an invention superior to “Bridging the Abyss;” one could expect anything from him: a wonderful chap, Jimmy! A bit cracked, though, with ideas of his own which went the round of the profession and were variously appreciated. A fund for stage-children; a reserve upon their earnings, to be banked and kept untouched till they came of age; a home of rest for the old and the sick; a weekly *matinée* for the benefit of the fund. . . .

Jimmy described the piteous lot of those who grew old in a profession intended for youth:

“But a few shillings a month paid into the fund, a benefit performance or two . . . and our home is established and endowed and we should see no more stars flung aside, to die in poverty, after amusing crowds of people for years and years.”

“I'm with you,” said Lily, laughing. “Put me down for a pension for my old age . . . if ever I reach old age . . . ugh, ugh!”

And she coughed, with the embroidered handkerchief at her lips.

But Lily's joke was left unechoed: everybody talked professional shop, quoted figures; the habit of signing contracts, of avoiding the traps laid by the agents had given them all a keen sense of business. And the frequent travelling, in the absence of education, had made them sharp at understanding, quick in the uptake. Their clean-shaven faces fell into the wise folds, like lawyers'.

Jimmy also explained his idea about the apprentices, the compulsory so much per cent., the inalienable deposit paid in by the Pas and Mas . . . and, much more still, by the profs and managers.

"Good!" said Lily. "I'm with you, damn it!"

There was a general laugh. The Whistling Wonder interrupted the conversation by quacking like a duck at Jimmy and cooing like a pigeon at Lily. Jimmy got up and said good-bye, pleased to see Lily making daily progress.

"Ah, Lily," they said again, when he had gone, "that's the one you ought to have married, not the other!"

And thereupon they began to pursue their favourite theme and amuse themselves by describing the awful diseases which she would catch one day with "the other," that drunkard—the man with the thirty-six girls! And they laughed and they laughed, my! Lily herself held her sides with laughing.

All this was stage effect, professional exaggeration. Lily dared not indulge in it before Jimmy. She was more sincere, always a little embarrassed, in the presence of that man towards whom everybody was driving her, as though they all saw farther into her life than she herself could. She was no longer ill, only tired, with an accumulation of past wearinesses that made her love to lie flat on her back. But she would get up to-morrow,

instead of remaining in bed to see her friends : no humbug before Jimmy.

The next day, when he came, Lily was alone. So much the better—he had something to say to her. He had made up his mind that day. His own present prosperity formed so great a contrast with the poverty of Lily . . . that poor kiddie who had run away from home in pursuit of happiness and whom he now found here, in this squalid room. . . . It was all very well to theorize about children who have earned fortunes and who haven't a farthing ; but that was mere talk ! Suppose he helped Lily a little, in the meantime. He had prepared all sorts of good reasons ; he had found a smart excuse, the great excuse of the music-hall, that he had been betting on horses and losing. He would ask Lily to keep his money for him, as a kindness, otherwise he simply couldn't help it, his money burned a hole in his pocket. Then, on second thoughts, why all that fuss ? Hadn't he known her since she was that high ? And, the moment he came in, he just handed Lily a thousand-mark note :

“ For the rest of the law-costs, Lily ! And, anything over, for your expenses, till Trampy's money comes. Only too pleased to be of any use. You can pay it back when it suits you. And good-bye, Lily, ta-ta ! ”

And he hurried out, leaving Lily with the thousand marks in her hand.

Lily was stupefied and confused. She asked herself why. . . . Why ? . . . It was a real piece of brain-work, which made her head ache. Anyhow, she would give back the money to-morrow ! She wouldn't keep it ! Trampy would be sure to bring some ; it was impossible that he should bring nothing ; but, come what may, she would give back the money to-morrow ! She took the great oath of the stage upon it : three fingers of her right hand uplifted ; her left hand on the lucky charm. And

then she shut the door, turned the key in the lock and lay down. . . .

A noise woke her: some one was knocking outside; but, before she could get out of bed, one of the glass panes of the door broke into fragments. Somebody had smashed it with his elbow. A hand came through the opening, turned back the key. The door opened and Trampy entered, raging, growling:

"There's a man here!"

"You won't find him; you can kill me if you do!" cried Lily.

She expected a terrible scene. Trampy, drunk, had the look which he wore on his bad days. He peered into the corners, turned a cunning eye on Lily.

Trampy had spent the evening at the café and there heard of the visits which Lily received during his absence. The neighbours he didn't mind about, but Jimmy, Jimmy again! The damned dog! Why should he come poking his nose in? And, perhaps, at heart, Trampy was not sorry to have a scene with Lily, for he wasn't bringing home a *Pfennig*, had spent all his money on champagne with girls. He felt himself at fault. He would get out of it, as best he could, with violence.

"There's a man here!" repeated Trampy, walking up to Lily like a madman.

She felt humiliated to the core when she saw Trampy, dazed with tobacco, heavy with beer, stoop and look under the bed. And, suddenly, seeing the bank-note which Lily had laid on the table, Trampy shouted:

"You can't deny it this time. Tell me where the money comes from!"

"It's from Jimmy," said Lily, beside herself. "He thinks of me, Jimmy does, while you leave me here to starve. It's . . . it's for the law-costs."



"Oh, that's another thing!" said Trampy, putting the note in his pocket.

"Let the money be!" cried Lily, leaping out of bed. "Don't you touch it!"

"Everything here belongs to me, I should think," said Trampy, a little more calmly, already overcome with drunken drowsiness. "Everything, even a dear little wifey," he continued, putting his snout under Lily's disgusted nose.

But she gave a movement of revulsion so spontaneous that Trampy turned pale under the insult:

"W-what! N-no love?" he stammered. "I'm not used to that. I can get l-l-love for the asking . . . at the ca-ca-café . . . or the th-theatre . . . or anywhere."

And Trampy, making a false step, caught hold of the curtain and drew it back.

In the pitiless light of the morning, he appeared to Lily like a drowned man, with a puffed-out face, swollen eyes and wan cheeks. To think that she belonged to that! Lily spat at him in contempt. Oh, rather sleep with lizards and guinea-pigs than that; rather with a woolly dog, like Poland, that Parisienne! Oh, to get rid of him and be free again, thought Lily, never again to have Trampy before her eyes! And, suddenly, her mind was made up. She dressed herself, hurriedly.

"Where are you going?" asked Trampy.

"I'm off!" said Lily. "I've had enough of this!"

"What's that?" said Trampy, dull-mouthed, flinging his body across the bed. "What's that? Say it again!"

"I say I hate the sight of you! I'm going back to my Pa and Ma!"

"You, you're going back to . . . Well, good-bye, darling, goo-good . . . goo-good-bye, . . ." stammered Trampy, sprawling on the bed, among the disordered clothes. . . .

Lily moved freely round the room, without even troubling about him, like one who has made up her mind once and for all. She packed up her things in the basket trunk. She put her bike outside the door ; and, just as she was going to look for a neighbour to help her down with her trunk, an idea entered her head. She stopped on the threshold, came back to Trampy, slipped her hand into his pocket and gingerly took out the bank-note :

“An insult like that !” she muttered. “I’d rather starve than not give Jimmy back the money !”

## VI

"LILY!" . . .

She thought she heard herself called, in her dream, just because she was back in her room in London, among familiar objects. She felt as if her life was going on exactly as in the old days, as if nothing had happened in between. Her marriage? A nightmare. And her home-coming yesterday had been very nice : no questions asked, no whys and hows. Her parents knew, of course. They knew all about her troubles with Trampy. But no reproaches, nothing : kisses, everybody very happy, including herself. As she snuggled under the bedclothes, in the hollow left by Glass-Eye, who had gone downstairs, Lily felt sorry that she had left her trunk at the hotel, when she thought of the cordial welcome she had received at the hands of Pa and Ma.

It was quite three weeks since she left her husband. She went over it all again in her head. Her departure from Berlin ! She had meant to go straight to Jimmy, first, and give him back that money ; only, those Vienna hats in the shop-windows, those dresses, those boots : when she saw all that, Lily understood that she could not return to London, to her parents, with dingy-looking clothes, after her successes on the continent ! Pa and Ma would have laughed in her face.

Lily felt bound to say that she had been most reasonable : three hundred marks for that Vienna dress, which suited her so well ; why, Jimmy himself would have approved.

"Let's see!"

She reckoned on her fingers: forty marks the hat, three hundred the dress; and the underthings, chemises, stays, a silk petticoat, boots . . . that came to . . . came to . . . A week at an hotel in Berlin . . . time lost at Hamburg . . . the journey from Hamburg to Rotterdam, Harwich and London . . . the hotel on arriving, so as to be able to dress before going home: it left her just fifty shillings to play the lady with and buy presents for Pa and Ma. And Jimmy . . . Jimmy, who was in London also, due to open soon! And she had sworn that she would give him back that money at once! To quiet her conscience, Lily, under her blankets, took the "counter-oath" of the stage, with her left hand behind her back, the fingers closed over the thumb; but she would repay him the money, most certainly, as soon as she began to earn any.

"Lily! Can I come in, Lily?"

It was Ma, bringing her breakfast and a paper, *The Era*. Lily gave a quick glance round the room: her skirt was hanging on the peg; the bodice lay, without a crease, over the back of a chair, the hat on top of it, the linen neatly folded: good! She did not look a scarecrow, at any rate! And, sitting up against the pillows, with a napkin on her knees, Lily breakfasted daintily, with her finger-tips:

"Pa, where's Pa?" asked Lily. "Tell him to come up."

"Your Pa has gone out with the apprentices," said Ma. "He wouldn't wake you, you looked so tired last night. Here, Lily, some more coffee? Another slice of bread and butter?" continued Ma, spreading it for her.

"'K you!"

Lily accepted this as her due, like a lady accustomed

to the habits of good society, to having her breakfast brought to her in bed by the maid.

"Oh, Ma," said Lily, as she sugared her coffee, "they do understand things on the continent! They know how to appreciate artistes there. I've had such successes!"

"And you were angry with us for teaching you your profession," said Ma. "You see now that it was for your good."

"But it depends on how it's done," said Lily. "If I had always been treated like this, I should never have left you."

"Well, you don't bear your Pa and me a grudge, I suppose," said Ma, "or you wouldn't have come back. We knew you'd come back. This has always been your address; your Pa never took your name out of *The Era*."

"You didn't treat me fair," said Lily, "but I've forgotten most of it. Oh, don't let's talk about it any more! Let's talk of something else; let's talk of you."

Lily knew all about their struggles, their successes; had heard of it all on the stage, in the cafés. But here, in her room, listening to Ma's description, she put her finger on the spot, so to speak, and realized more fully what a blank her flight had made, what a catastrophe it had been for them.

And Ma gave details, tried to interest Lily in the fate of the troupe, told her that, for months, the troupe had been refused everywhere, because Lily wasn't in it, and that her Pa had had to change apprentices.

"I was the troupe!" said Lily.

"Oh, the trouble your Pa took running after his own fat freaks! I thought he would get heart-disease! And months of it, without earning a thing. Oh, if your Pa hadn't had some money. . . !"

"But he had plenty!" said Lily.

"Oh, not much, not so much as you think!" Ma

hastened to say, thinking she saw a spiteful allusion in Lily's remark.

"Yes, all right, I know," said Lily. "Never mind about that. It's my turn to make money now, for myself."

"Still that independent spirit! We haven't got her yet!" thought Ma.

And she went on talking of the troupe, of the cousin who played the star.

"Pooh!" said Lily. "A nice sort of star!"

"It's not every one who can star in Berlin by herself, like you," said Ma. "Do you know, Lily, you ought to stay with us: we should get on so well together. You would manage the troupe; and, one day—who knows?—you might make a nice marriage."

"But I am married, Ma! I didn't live with him! Do you mean to say you think . . . ? Not I!"

"I know you're married, but you can get a divorce. Jimmy used to make love to you; now *there's* a man who . . ."

"And you used to say he was a drunkard, Ma!"

"Never!" said Ma, rising to leave.

Lily was flattered, at heart, to be received like that. She also felt proud that her Pa had not been ashamed of her and that he had kept her name in *The Era*. Well, they treated her as a lady, saw her value, gave her her due. And she lay for a while enjoying her triumph, while she turned the pages of *The Era* in an absent-minded way: Miss This, Miss That, Cape Town, Calcutta . . . actors, singers. . . .

"Those aren't artistes, any of them!"

Programmes, plays, songs: "*Why I Love Women!*"

"I know, you footy rotter!"

"*Is Marriage a Failure?*"

"I should think so!" thought Lily.

And articles, biographies. . . .

"Pack of lies!" thought Lily.

And pages of "Wanted . . . Wanted. . . ."

Lily ran her eye down the columns: artistes' boarding-houses, costumiers, scene-painters, dancing-schools, every town, every theatre. Hullo!—she had turned the page—Tom, the dancer . . . Hullo! At Milan!

"Bravo, Tom!"

Jimmy at the Hippodrome next week; private address, Whitcomb Mansions.

"Pooh, he's well off! What's fifty pounds to him?"

"Hullo! Miss Lily . . . Berlin . . . Permanent address, Rathbone Place, London, W.

"Well done, Pa! Serve him right, that tramp-cyclist!" said Lily, throwing down the paper and jumping out of bed.

Quite a business, her toilet. She was two hours titivating herself. She wanted Pa and Ma to be proud of her, of her successes on the continent. And, when the apprentices came in from practice, you should have seen her walk into the dining-room. A little air of simplicity, her forehead put out for her delighted Pa to kiss, hands all round—"Hullo, girls! Hullo, Daisy!"—and she sat down like a lady who, although accustomed to smart restaurants, does not despise dinner at home, with a boiled leg of mutton to recruit her inside after those champagne-suppers, those truffled pheasants, that damned continental cooking! She accepted everything, and thought it all very nice: simple life, simple joys, the only ones!

She set a good example to the new apprentices, who eyed her stealthily, instead of eating, for Miss Lily's presence turned their heads entirely. My! A star like that, a real one! Lily Clifton, the New Zealander on Wheels! And dressed . . . dressed like a lady in the front boxes! Cousin Daisy was green with jealousy. Lily talked of her travels, her successes and the crossing,

gee ! Waves " miles high," the boat standing on end ! Glass-Eye Maud devoured her with her one eye, screwed up her fat red cheeks in a fixed and motionless laugh, scared before Lily, who came from over the sea, from countries where savages live. Glass-Eye, in her perturbation, served Lily first. Pa made no objection, asked Lily's permission to light his pipe : was she sure she didn't object to smoking ? Lord, you never knew, with those ladies ! He swelled with pride. Had it been Christmas-time, he would have ordered a pudding, my, a real wedding-cake three feet across ! His ideas of grandeur returned, his triumphal tour round the world, the definite extermination of the fat freaks . . . if Lily remained with him . . .

After dinner, the apprentices retired, to finish sewing some bloomers. Lily approved :

" Bloomers ? Very nice . . . for a troupe ! "

Presently, in the afternoon, the three of them went for a walk : Pa freshly shaven ; Ma decked out in her jewellery : Lily did not wear any, " only in the evening when she went into society." Tottenham Court Road, the Palace, the Hippodrome . . . Pa would have liked to write up on his hat :

" Lily has come back ! "

He looked to right and left, had the satisfaction of distributing nods and bows to different artistes, with Lily on his arm, as though to say :

" You see it was wrong, all that people were saying, about those smackings ! And the proof is, here she is, on my arm, damn it ! "

As for Lily, she thought only of showing herself :

" If Trampy could see me now ! " she reflected. " And Jimmy, if he could see me, in my fine dress, while it's still new ! "

Regent Street reminded Lily of Pa's generosity. She would not be behindhand. Pa had to accept a red tie, a



pair of gloves, a match-box, as a present ; Ma, an embroidered handkerchief, a lucky charm. Lily had the satisfaction of paying with gold and receiving change.

She was tired, in the evening, put on a languid air : gee, her mother would have shaken her for less in the old days ! Lily put it on still more, to show them all that times were changed. But she did the troupe the honour of going to see their performance at the Castle. It was a great success for her :

“ Made a bit, eh ? ” asked the manager, seeing her fine dress. “ Coming back for good, to star with the New Zealanders ? ”

“ I don’t know ; I shall see.”

Lily was quite ready to come back, in her own mind, but she wanted to return in triumph. It all depended on the price offered : to think that she had worked for them at ten shillings a week, when she was worth quite two pounds a night ! She would see ; she would make her own conditions : for instance, herself in tights, the others in bloomers . . . a special tune for her entrance . . . no star beside herself !

Lily watched the New Zealanders’ performance with the air of an expert :

“ Not so bad ; quite good. . . .”

And she had various ideas : herself as a fine lady, undressing on the stage. Or rather, no, as a statue, on a pedestal in a park . . . with Cousin Daisy at her feet, throwing flowers to her. Then she would come to life, as though waking from sleep, and step down prettily to a special tune. Hullo, what’s this ? A bike ! And then, gee, a blast of the trombone and she would show them what a star was, a real one ! Yes . . . if Pa and Ma insisted . . . perhaps. . . .

But her real triumph was next day, at practice. Her Pa, excited by her presence, ran and ran, notwithstanding

his palpitations of the heart. It was no use his trying to restrain himself : his enthusiasm mastered him as soon as he saw them in the saddle, his little woolly-legs !

And no more Tom : he was all by himself now ; and, when he sat down to take breath, he still ordered his little woolly-legs about, shouted his cutting remarks at them.

Lily raised her head proudly. She seemed to take the apprentices to witness. She had gone through that, much worse than that, for years ! She was a gentle little lady, all the same. Besides, she was all for gentleness :

"Leave her to me, Pa ; you're making poor Cousin Daisy quite nervous. She doesn't know ; I'll show her !"

And, under her great waving feather, Lily, without even taking off her gloves :

"There, put your foot there . . . like that . . . and like that . . . firmly. No, not like that !"

And, suddenly, stimulated with professional zeal :

"Wait, I'll show you how it's done !"

And, in an instant, to show them all how you're got up when you're a star and when you come back from the continent, Lily took off her bodice, pinned up her skirt amid the rustling of the silk and, bare-armed, in a lace-trimmed chemisette :

"Now then, I'll show you !"

And Lily, with all her little muscles alive, took a bike, jumped on it as she would on a stool and then—yoop !—the bike on its back-wheel, spinning round like a top.

"Twirls are as easy as anything : you only have to know how to do them. Come on ! Have a try !"

And the other, encouraged by a friendly slap, tried in her turn and—yoop !—succeeded . . . very nearly.

Pa was enraptured at the mere sight of Lily's curled nostrils and her earnest look :

"What a professor she would make !" he thought.

"If ever she takes the belt, she'll be simply grand. I can just fold my arms!"

But he made her dress very quickly. That exhibition of dainty underwear, which flattered his pride as a father, would have driven girls used to sewing their own calico shifts quite crazy: there would have been no holding them; and, besides, artistes might come in at any moment. It would not do for Lily to be seen half-dressed like that; and she realized this herself, like a sensible little lady, who hates scandal.

"Stay with us, Lily," said her Pa, at home, after dinner, when the apprentices had gone out. "Stay with us."

"It's your duty," said Ma.

"If you stay," continued Pa, "I'll make you a present of a brand-new banjo!"

"Thank you, no more banjo for me," said Lily, laughing. "I've had my share."

"All right, no more banjo," agreed Pa, "provided you stay with us: that's all I ask. I shall be afraid of nobody then; I'll show them what an artiste is!"

And, warming to his subject, Pa built up his plans: the great English tours; and Eastern and Western America; Australia, South Africa:

"Eh, Lily? Wouldn't you like to see it all again? Or else, for once, I'll get up a troupe and take it round the world myself, with you in it!"

"But, Pa," said Lily, very coldly, "I have business arrangements of my own, more engagements than I want."

"It's a business arrangement I'm proposing to you," said Pa.

"And shall I come on in tights?"

"In tights, if you like."

"And no other star but me!" continued Lily, explaining her idea: undressing on the stage, or else the statue, her own scenery. . . .

"Capital notion!" cried Pa.

"And then there's the money side of the question," said Lily. "I make a lot of money now. I want to work for myself."

"And what you make with us, won't it be yours, one day?" suggested Ma.

"Stay with us," said Pa, "and Trampy will burst with spite and you'll be much happier here, with your Pa and Ma, instead of with that good-for-nothing blighter."

"Or instead of remaining alone, which is even worse," Ma insisted. "You want us still, Lily . . ."

"And you me! Let us talk business," interrupted Lily, who would have liked a pencil and paper, to make her calculations with.

Ma, in her heart of hearts, did not think it at all nice of a daughter to consider only her own interests; but Pa hastened to say that he thought Lily was quite right . . . although he was greatly embarrassed in reality and asked himself how much he could well offer her, so as to make a profit for himself.

Fortunately, he was relieved of his predicament by Glass-Eye, who came in with a telegram for Miss Lily.

"Give it here!" said Lily, who noticed, as she opened the envelope, that a chair had creaked and that the palm of her left hand was itching: a sign of money. "I'll bet it's about an engagement. I have offers from every side; you have no idea. . . . Well, I never!" she said. "A telegram from Jimmy, at the Horse Shoe! I thought he was at Whitcomb Mansions. What can he want with me? He asks me to call on him! Funny way of treating a lady. Why can't he come himself?"

But Pa and Ma thought differently: Jimmy was "somebody," a man to be considered, right at the top of the profession; she'd have done better to marry him and not her Trampy Wheel-Pad!

"You must go," insisted Ma. "Don't you like going alone? Shall I come with you?"

"Yes, that's different," said Lily, who had a certain pride and who felt sure that Jimmy would never mention that thousand marks before a witness.

Her heart beat a little, as she went up the staircase of the Horse Shoe to the third floor, on the left, room 32. At first, she was surprised that he should be there, having read in *The Era* . . . But he might have moved. On the whole, she was not sorry to show herself to Jimmy in her pretty frock, he having seen her last in her room in Berlin, looking ill, unkempt and frightfully ugly. She was not sorry, either, that Ma was with her:

"He's in love, I suppose," said Lily. "Everybody makes love to me: why do they, Ma? I'm not a bit pretty, off the stage."

And she took a mischievous pleasure in enlarging upon her successes and her flirtations, there, on the staircase of the Horse Shoe, with Ma beside her and no smackings, gee, nor any fear of smackings in the future! What a change since her marriage!

"Yes," Lily went on, as she read the numbers on the doors—29—"Ma, you ought to see the flowers I get, the chocolates, the sweets"—31—"but all that does not prevent a lady from keeping straight"—32. . . .

Then she gave a stifled cry, her voice stuck in her throat: Trampy, Trampy himself stood in the doorway, his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth, his hat cocked over one ear; and he looked at her with a bantering air:

"Sorry to disappoint you, Miss Lily. You hoped to find some one else, eh?"

Ma, utterly flabbergasted, had dropped on to a bench in the passage, in the shadow. Trampy did not even see her. Lily was crimson with shame at being caught tripping by Trampy: she could not deny it. She wanted to

run away, but, stupefied with surprise, remained where she stood, with dilated pupils, open-mouthed.

"You can look at me till to-morrow morning and it won't help you," said Trampy quietly, with the air of a man who has prepared his speech. "I've got you this time! I sent the telegram; I knew you'd come, wherever he thought fit to meet you; you'd have come for less than Jimmy; you'd have come for the impersonator or any one else, never mind who; any one in the rotten lot, any gentleman in the front boxes, eh? It's 'Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad!' with you! But I thought Jimmy would do best, Jimmy your lover, whom you followed to London. Now my luck has brought me here, too . . . for my *work* . . . not like you! And, by the way, Miss Lily, have you brought me that thousand marks which you got from Jimmy and which I was going to give back to him, when you stole it out of my pocket? Or did you spend it on the way here? You hadn't a rag to your back, when you left me, and I find you dressed up like a Tottie. My compliments, Miss Lily."

"O God, strike him dead!" prayed Lily. "Strike him, kill him, kill him!"

Lily felt like fainting. She could not breathe, her ribs seemed to be crushing her lungs. At last she drew a long, slow breath:

"Well," she stammered, overcome with shame, "well, we can be divorced . . . if you like."

"I'll see," said Trampy, hardening his voice and throwing away his cigar. "Go back to your Jimmy in the meantime. You may be sure I have no use for a traitress like you, an idler who refuses to work, a woman who lets every man make love to her!" And, suddenly, pointing to the stairs, "I've no further use for you! Get out of this, you damned chippy! And you're not *going*, mind you: I'm kicking you out!"

And therewith Trampy went back into his room and slammed the door in her face.

Mrs. Clifton and Lily remained glued where they were. At last, Ma, trembling all over, rose from the bench and led away her daughter, who shook her fist at the door, crying :

"Liar !"

"Why didn't you speak just now, my poor Lily ?" said Ma. "You ought to have answered back ! So it's all true, is it ? A nice thing ! You, who pretended . . ."

"Oh, let go, you're crushing my sleeve !" retorted Lily, angrily, pulling her arm away from the hand that clasped it.

She went down the stairs, followed by Ma, without knowing what she was doing. She would have liked to find a train on the pavement, a motor, to jump into it, to make off and never see anybody again after the humiliation which she had undergone before Ma.

She flung herself into the first cab that came along, yelled a direction to the driver : Hyde Park, anywhere ! Ma found herself by her side, without being asked to step in, and Ma repeated :

"Lily, you ought to have . . . Why did you let him treat you like that ? Is it true ?"

"First of all," said Lily, suddenly turning and facing her Ma, "first of all, it's your fault . . . yours . . . all that's happened, damn it ! If you had been less hard on me, I shouldn't have gone off with that footy rotter !"

"I've often been sorry since," said Ma. "I've been very sorry for it. Calm yourself, Lily. And then . . . were we so very wrong ? Look how your husband has just treated you before me, before your mother !"

"He's a liar ! I swear it !"

"And Jimmy's thousand marks ? What was that money for ? Why didn't you give it back ?"

"It's a lie! It's a lie!"

"You, who pretended you were making such a lot of money!" continued Ma. "There's not a word of truth in what you said. You haven't a penny, I can see. Oh, you're the same as ever, my poor Lily—extravagant habits, dresses—and here you are, penniless, left to yourself with your expensive tastes. You'll die in poverty one day, without a Pa or Ma. Come back to us, Lily."

"To make nothing? No, thank you!"

"Who says so?"

"Oh, I know! Ten shillings a week, eh? Family life, as that old beast of a Fuchs says!"

"Lily," said Ma severely, "don't insult decent people! Have some respect, at any rate."

But Lily had no respect left for anybody. Pas, Mas, Trampies, Nunkies, one and all, were so many slave-drivers!

"And yet it's quite true, I'm penniless," thought Lily to herself. "I who have earned a fortune for you!" she grumbled, stifling a sob.

"You're mad, my poor Lily! All that we have will be yours some day. You never think of the future; you spend your last penny."

"I earn and I spend!"

"And suppose you fell ill, my poor Lily?"

"Hospitals aren't made for dogs! Besides, I have friends. And then, at least, I shall have had some fun for my money, while you . . . If you died to-morrow, Pa would marry another woman, who would spend all your savings, all the money I have earned for you."

"Lily," cried Mrs. Clifton, "you're insulting your father!"

"I'm telling you things as they are; and I won't come back to you, because I can make more elsewhere! Every one for himself!"



"But you don't make a penny!" said Ma, gradually getting angry. "You heard Trampy, just now. He called you an idler. Your Pa, at least, used to make you work. You're trying to bluff us with those stories of your successes. I dare say you'll be glad, one day, of a crust of bread with us."

"Ma!"

"Your contracts," said Ma, "you're always talking of your contracts. I should like to see them and your programmes too."

"Certainly," said Lily. "I'll show them to you: Munich, Berlin, Hamburg. I've had successes everywhere, engagements everywhere! I make more by myself than all Pa's troupe put together!"

"Yes, but how do you get your engagements?" said Ma, pale with anger, seeing that Lily was escaping them and, this time, for good. "Tell me how you get them?"

"Why, through my talent, I suppose."

"Your talent! Pooh! You've none left! You get them through your friends: through your Jimmy, your gentlemen friends . . ."

"That's a lie!"

"You get them . . . by looking pretty and getting round the men . . . you . . . you . . . you . . ."

"Mother!"

Lily drew back her shoulder, her arm stiff, ready to strike; but a sense of respect withheld her.

"Stop!" she cried to the cabman, in a hoarse voice.

And, without even waiting for the cab to pull up beside the curb, Lily jumped out in the roadway, right into the mud.

"Mother," she said to Mrs. Clifton, "mother, I shall never forget this!"

And, mechanically, in her haste to get away, she handed

the man what money she had left, made a sign to him to go on and, without saying good-bye, Lily saw the cab drive off. It was evening, in a quiet street: where was she? Lily did not know; her head was in a whirl. She recognized Old Compton Street: had they gone no farther? It seemed to her that she had been riding for an hour . . . but no, barely a few minutes. . . .

Alone in London, without money, in the mud, in the dark, in the gutter! Oh, she wished she could be swallowed up in the sewer! She felt like killing herself:

"If I walk towards the Thames," she muttered, "I am done for!"

And she took a street on the left, leading in the direction of the Embankment.

The movement restored her to her self-consciousness. An idea came to her, a distant hope, a glimmer, very faint at first, which suddenly grew in dimensions within her and lit her up in every particle. Jimmy! He appeared to her, all at once, like a giant eight feet high, as on his posters. Ah, people seemed to associate her life with his, to presume all sorts of things . . . though he had never even kissed her! Yes, he had . . . on the stage . . . in Berlin; but that was before everybody! And everything drove her towards him, she always found herself on his path: Jimmy was everywhere, always. And Jimmy was powerful and he was good-looking and he loved her! He loved her! To keep straight was no use. Why, all of them, all of them, including her husband, that footy rotter, who was jealous of Jimmy without reason: she'd give him cause for jealousy soon, if it killed him with rage, him and all the rotten lot! And she'd do it that very moment! At two minutes' walk from where she stood, in Whitcomb Mansions! She was not one of those women whom you can drive to despair with impunity: she had her revenge ready. . . .

Jimmy was alone in his room ; his table was covered with books and papers. He was still at his great plan.

Jimmy sat plunged in work, without the least thought of what was happening near him : he did not even know that Lily was in London. His installation of " Bridging the Abyss " at the Hippodrome had taken him the whole day. There was a scenic effect to contrive with the manager : a " hydrodrama " . . . bridging the abyss over a torrent . . . with a waterfall behind . . . and the whole thing set and framed in a pantomime, which was ready for production, because Jimmy had been expected for a month ; in short, it would go of itself.

And under the peaceful light he resumed his compasses, or else flung himself back in his chair, lit a cigarette, followed the smoke with his eyes. . . .

Poor Lily, what was she doing, over there, in Berlin ? thought Jimmy. She deserved something better than Trampy, that adorable Lily, to whom he, Jimmy, would gladly have devoted his life . . . and whom he felt as it were swelling up inside him . . . in his heart . . . in his brain . . . in spite of himself ! That poor Lily ! To think that he could do nothing for her, that he almost regretted having done her a service, after the short scene which he had had the next day with Trampy, blinded with jealousy, because he, Jimmy, had visited Lily during his absence ; the reproaches which that simple action had earned for him :

" Look here, you righter of wrongs, you who preach to others and go making love to their wives ! "

To have put himself in a position that he could be spoken to like that, in a position to have Lily suspected ! What a shame ! Oh, the worries it would cause her ! Yes, he had been imprudent, perhaps : it was all his fault ; another man's wife. . . .

A tap at the door. It was opened behind him, before

he had time to say "Come in," and Lily walked up to Jimmy, who sat dumb with surprise: a strange Lily, feverish, distraught with passion. At any other time, she would have felt constrained, because of the thousand marks, or proud to show off her dress. Perhaps also she had prepared things to say. But all that was forgotten, gone, blown away, like a straw in the storm, for nothing came from her but this, in an anxious voice:

"Tell me, Jimmy, is it true that you love me?"

"Why," said Jimmy, perceiving Lily's agitation, without guessing the reason: oh, but for Lily to do a thing like that! How she would regret it later; it was terrible, this time, really. He saw it all at a glance; a great pity overcame him; and yet he was a man of flesh and blood and felt stirred to the marrow. "Why," he began, in a voice which he strove to make friendly, no more, "why, Lily, who told you that? Why, really . . . I . . ."

"Jimmy," she cried, fixing her eyes, like two flaming swords, upon him, "answer me! Do you love me or not?"

Jimmy, turning as pale as a corpse, looked at her without flinching and shook his head in sign of no.

"Oh, you mean cur!" roared Lily.

And she struck him on the face with her clenched fist.

Then she went out without a word, ran down the stairs, out into the blaze of Leicester Square, made for the dark streets and plunged into the night. . . .

## PART THIRD.

# INTERMEZZO

### I

THE artistes' special left Euston at noon that Sunday. The Three Graces were the first to arrive ; then the waiting-rooms, until lately deserted, began to fill with silent groups of five or six persons at a time, who had arranged the night before, at the theatre, to travel together and avail themselves of the reduction allowed to members of the M.H.A.R.A. : a reduction of at least a third, provided there were five in the party. They now swarmed into the station from every side : pale faces, under huge feathers ; wrists hooped round with bangles ; breasts bristling with golliwogs and lucky charms. There were little girls with bows over their ears, dressed in plush and velvet and following their Pas and Mas. There were troupes of carpet acrobats, with low foreheads, broad shoulders and bow legs ; and profs, bosses and managers, recognizable by the richness of their watch-chains, looked after the luggage. Theatre-vans discharged immense basket trunks, marked with letters a foot high—" Brothers This . . . Sisters That . . . So-and-so Trio . . . Miss Such-and-such "—and bearing on the handles, on the yellow labels of the M.H.A.R.A., addresses of Empires and Palaces and of Grand Opera-houses and Grand Theatres, too, for there were not only " artistes," but singers, actresses, " chicken-

necks," "woolly-legs," who rubbed shoulders with the muscular acrobats. All of them crowded round the booking-office; they handed in professional cards, helped one another, among pros; those who were travelling alone borrowed the others' tickets to enable them to get their over-weight luggage labelled: complicated pieces of apparatus, nickel-plated rods wrapped up in sacking, equilibrists' perches; the coaches, which were carried by assault, were encumbered with hand-luggage: bags, parcels, picture-frames containing photos for the theatre-doors, heaped up in the racks, under the seats, in the corridor; and there was a constant fire of "Hullo, girls!" "Hullo, boys!"

The Three Graces, standing at the carriage-door, after their things were settled, watched this tumult sadly, especially Thea. What was it? Nunkie's absence? No, but poor Lily had been kicked out by her husband, so they heard, and turned out by her mother as well: was it possible? Lily was dead or vanished, they didn't know which; they were told about it at the theatre: a stage hand had met her near St. Martin's Lane, in a small street, with her hair undone and her hat on the back of her head, crying, biting her handkerchief, drunk, apparently, and running in the direction of the Thames. And, since then, they had had no news of her.

"Poor Lily, what can she have done, what can have happened?" sighed Thea. "Poor Lily, she was always so nice!"

Thea could have cried for sadness.

The start caused a diversion. The collector punched the tickets:

"Blackpool? Glasgow?"

The Three Graces stepped in, the engine whistled. But a porter rushed past, pushing before him, with a rumbling like thunder, a huge trunk on a barrow. Thea

turned her head and a name in scarlet letters caught her eyes: "Miss Lily!" And, running after the trunk, magnificently bedizened, in a hat all feathers and gold tassels . . . who? What? Lily! Lily herself, red and out of breath, leading her bike with one hand, carrying an umbrella in the other, and Glass-Eye, her arms stretched wide with parcels, following in her track! Just time to throw her bike to the porter in the luggage-van and quick, quick, Lily came scudding back, hustled along by the train-master! She would have missed the start, were it not for Thea, who opened the door and, with her arms of steel, gripped her as she passed:

"Hullo, Lily! That's a good girl! Quick!"

Lily leapt into the carriage with a bound. Glass-Eye, entangled in her parcels, had, amid general laughter, to be dragged by main force through the narrow doorway, like a piece of luggage. Oof, just in time! They were off!

In the railway-carriage was nothing but gaiety and handshaking and ingenuous questions:

"Travelling by yourself? Where's Trampy? And your Pa and Ma? So you're not dead, eh?"

"Certainly not," said Lily. "If they had come to annoy me at the station, I'd have shown them if I was alive or dead! I was ready for them!"

And she brandished her umbrella.

Then she had to make herself comfortable, to find room for all her belongings as best she could. Lily hustled Glass-Eye, like a fine lady used to being waited on:

"Here, take my hat, Glass-Eye; hang it up. Take my wrist-bag. Wait, give me my handkerchief first."

To look at Lily, all fresh and rosy, one would never have suspected the trials she had passed through, but a few days ago. Still quite flustered with that hurried departure, she smiled as she watched the Three Graces, who, on their side, were carefully folding up their cloaks.

And the train rushed on, rushed on through deep cuttings, dashed through deserted stations . . . and then, suddenly, entered a tunnel.

Lily, but for the noise of the wheels, would have seen herself as she was that night. Oh, she would never forget it! It clutched at her heart. She clenched her fists with anger. Turned out by Trampy! Insulted by her Ma! Flouted by Jimmy, that mean cur! Oh, when she left his place, a few days ago, she felt like a mad-woman! Her first idea was to disappear, to take a header into the black water! But, ugh, the mud, the cold! And then the hospital, with those people who cut you up! She must also show Pa and Ma if it was through her gentlemen friends that she meant to earn more by herself alone than they and all their rotten troupe put together. Perhaps Pa and Ma would come to her, one day, to beg their bread! But Ma must first ask Lily's pardon on her knees. On her knees, damn it! And, in despair, inwardly raging, her chest aching with grief and spite, Lily, penniless, but brave and ready for the fray, returned to her hotel, where, to her great surprise, she found some one waiting for her, with a parcel in her hand. It was Glass-Eye.

It was, indeed, poor Glass-Eye. When she heard what had happened and that Lily would starve in London and a jolly good thing too, that she could sleep in Leicester Square for all they cared: when she heard this behind the door, Glass-Eye almost fainted. Without a word to a soul, she had packed up her parcel and gone to join Lily; and Lily, in her misery, cried for joy when she saw the decent girl, who offered her her savings, twelve shillings in all, saying:

"Take me with you, Miss Lily; I'll wait on you for nothing. Take me, take me!"

Oh, not to feel alone, to have some one beside you who loves you: that had consoled Lily.



The next day, accompanied by Glass-Eye, she called on the agents, in the Leicester Square quarter, at the risk of meeting Pa, or Trampy, or Jimmy; but who minded? With her umbrella in her hand, she feared nobody and did not care a fig for any of them.

Nothing for her at Kellermann's, where the Warwicks were starring. Very well, she'd come back again some other time! And straight on to Bill and Boom's in Whitcomb Mansions, below Jimmy. As she climbed the stairs, Lily screwed up her eyes, like a short-sighted person, for fear of meeting Jimmy, prepared a haughty attitude; but she saw no one. She was not kept waiting, was shown in at once to Boom's office. Lily Clifton? The New Zealander on Wheels? Straight away, a contract! And Lily left with twenty music-halls in her pocket: Liverpool, Birmingham, Sheffield and so on; a week in each town, beginning on Monday next. And that was how she got engagements through her gentlemen friends!

The next day, she borrowed some money on her contracts from the Brixton financier: "loans from five pounds upwards, in the strictest confidence." Then, proposed and seconded by two artistes, she joined the Variety Artists' Federation and, in return for ten shillings, received the red card of membership. She paid another ten shillings and the same for Glass-Eye, her maid, to the M.H.A.R.A. and obtained the right, for one year, to travel at reduced fares, including an insurance against accidents: five hundred pounds to her heirs in case of death—her heirs!—and two hundred and fifty pounds if she lost a hand or foot in a railway accident; and one hundred and fifty for a serious injury. Then she bought a big golliwog, for her dressing-room, and a little lucky charm for her watch-chain—a closed black hand, with the thumb between the fingers, as a preservative against falls—and with that and her bike she would have set out for India and Australia as

calmly as she might have taken the omnibus to Earl's Court.

Oh yes, she had done a deal in those few days and, above all, she had got out of her difficulties, thanks, to a certain extent, to Glass-Eye, who had comforted her. And besides, hang it, that was all over now ! The worries were forgotten ; and, as the train left the tunnel, Lily, with her arm round Glass-Eye's waist, was patting that decent girl, and Glass-Eye lifted her one good eye to Lily, while the other, the glass one, gazing fixedly at the door, reflected the thinly-scattered houses and the beginning of the country.

Lily, when she had recovered a little from her mad rush, lay down at full length among her bags, parcels and bandboxes. She laughed with the Three Graces ; and there was no one there to interfere with them ; there they were, by themselves, among themselves, alone in the compartment, a regular, rollicking school-girls' picnic. Lily made them scream by telling them about her life since they had last seen her. She felt a need for a reaction of gaiety, after her sadness of the days just past. The Graces fixed their round eyes upon her, upon that Lily who was so thoroughly up in all sorts of things which they knew only by hearsay : men, love. A life fit to kill a horse ; and a very nice girl, for all that : a kind of forbidden fruit, pink and fair-haired, soft to the touch ; and no jealousy between them, friendship rather, a rare thing in the profession. . . .

Lily grew excited in talking, told of her successes, the receptions, the teas she used to give in her drawing-room, in Berlin, when she was ill. Jossers, according to her, would have paid any price to have been there ! It would form a subject of conversation over there for many a long day to come. And then her journeys, her impressions of the continent—"Jam with your meat, my dear !"—and such clean dressing-rooms in Germany ; very severe managers, though : gee, harder than Pas ! But very good

to her, all the same. The Battenberg at Leipzig : nothing but leading turns ; and she had topped the bill at Leipzig ! And to see all those people eating during the show, when you were hungry yourself, had a very funny effect upon you. By the way, she didn't like that system of being lodged and boarded by the management ; it was all very well for those people ; but none of that for her : give her a nice flat in town or a smart hotel ! Once she was started, Lily never stopped, called Glass-Eye to witness, went on telling of her life in Berlin : how Jimmy had fallen in love with her, when he saw her on the stage, and had the cheek to want her to run away with him ; but who got a box on the ear that day, eh ? She, perhaps : yes, rather, over the left ! And Jimmy and Trampy had fought for her ! So had all the pros, worse than dogs in September !

"What a rotten lot !" concluded Lily.

"My, how you've changed !" said Thea. "You used to be so fond of men."

"I give it them where they deserve," said Lily, slapping her firm, round hips.

And they laughed noisily at Lily's anger when, with her shoulder drawn back and her arm ready to strike, she spoke of breaking the jaws of those two scoundrels.

"Go it ! Hit me !" said Thea, putting forward her deltoid muscle. "Hit away ! You'll only smash your wrist !"

And then the Spartans calmed down, asked one another for news of absent friends, talked about different people they had known, all over the place, on the stage : their conversation always came round to the profession. Lily, with greater refinement, sometimes tried to discuss dress : tulle ruches were to be worn this year, she heard ; feather boas. The Graces knew nothing about that, stuck to their "Did you ever know . . . ? Do you remember . . . ?" And every part of the world was mixed up in their talk : India, Tasmania, Mexico, South Wales,

New South Wales, York, New York, Hampshire, New Hampshire.

"Did you know Ave Maria?" asked Lily.

"No."

But they mentioned other friends, like school-girls living in the same quarter; only, for them, the school, the quarter was San Francisco, Chicago, Berlin; and the school-mates were the girl in a knot, who had sold her skeleton in advance to the Medical College; Marjutti, the double-knotted girl, to whom the South Kensington Museum offered five hundred pounds for a cast of her contortions; the Pawnees, who had just won a treble beauty prize; the Laurence girl, whose cruelly daring performance was forbidden by the Manchester police; and heaps of others whom they had known and who, at that moment, were asleep at the Antipodes, right under your feet, or waking up in the Far West, or going to bed in the Far East, or pitching on the ocean, or rolling in express trains towards the five corners of the earth: Bella Flip-Flap, Ada Crack-o'-Whip. And their own travelling adventures, the Graces' and Lily's: broken railway-bridges! Ships on fire at sea! Towns blazing up in the night! Ropes breaking, falls head-first, my! One would have thought that these girls of seventeen to twenty were South Sea pirates, talking of hangings and tortures, or, rather, children playing at frightening one another. Lily, for instance, in India: two eyes glaring at her in the dark, gee! And, in New York, a fall into a mirror; all over blood; half dead. She grew excited, in her desire to outdo Laurence and Crack-o'-Whip: the steel-buckled belt, the kicks in the ribs! Stories of brutal treatment picked up on every side—from the Gilson girl, from Ave Maria, from all the boys and all the girls and all the monkeys who had been through the mill—she made every one of them her own, served them up hot and hot to the astounded

Graces, talked of whole days spent in practising on rough, uneven boards—"And given no food, was I, Glass-Eye?"—so much so that she would sometimes get up in the night and go and pick up the crusts under the table, gee! Lily revelled in the pitying expressions of the Three Graces and her heart swelled with pride when Thea, greatly touched, remarked that, in such cases, it would have been better not to be born.

"You're quite right," said Lily, with a drooping air; but she burst into a peal of fresh, young laughter when she saw Glass-Eye overcome with emotion. "What's that?" asked Lily, giving her a thump in the ribs. "Crying? You silly cuckoo!"

If it hadn't been for her Ma's insults and Jimmy's and Trampy's—when it all came back to her, it was like a needle stuck in her heart—Lily would have been in the seventh heaven. No more Pa, no more Ma, no more anybody; no boss, no prof, no husband, nothing, all alone . . . with her maid! Certainly, there would be the worry of business, looking for her "digs," seeing the agents, writing letters and so on; but she would know how to put herself forward, how to make the most of her work; and she smiled as she reflected how little all those worries meant, compared with her past life; and she would be free, free, free at last. She was going to earn money, to enjoy life.

And the train rushed on, rushed on through the fields. Glass-Eye, with her nose glued to the window, was astonished to find everything so large outside London: red villages dotted the green country-side; and then came empty railway-stations. Sometimes the train slowed down: a large silent town lay spread in the valley, white smoke rose from the endless roofs; homes, more homes; the air of Sunday rest, the empty streets and the faint chimes of the church-bells proclaimed to the pale sky the

majesty of prayer. Lily listened with a dreamy air ; it all reminded her of things :

" It's like the American engines," she said to the Three Graces, " that used to ring their bells when they passed through Syracuse."

But the train rushed on, rushed on . . . And they again began to talk shop, as always, with, here and there, an excursion into the cost of food. The Graces, just then, were unpacking their lunch ; and Lily fetched her travelling-provisions from her bag in the corridor. There was a sound of clattering plates from end to end of the train, in a mist of tobacco-smoke. Lily rejoined the party very quickly, to avoid coming in contact with the pros, and, waited on by Glass-Eye, attacked her meal and broke her bread so heartily that the crusts flew to the ceiling. They drank out of the same cup, took their meat in their hands, Lily saying that fingers were made before forks. They chattered noisily, with the time-honoured jokes about apples and bananas. They made Glass-Eye talk a lot of nonsense. Lily, flinging back her head, laughed full-throated, held her sides.

" My ! " said the Graces. " What a pity that we are separating ! It would have been so nice to travel together ; one's never bored with you. What a tomboy ! "

" ' K you ! " said Lily, greatly flattered, with a stage curtsy.

Unfortunately, they would have to part at Warrington. The Graces were going on to Glasgow, Lily was changing for Liverpool ; a few moments more and it was good-bye, until chance . . .

At Lily's request, the Graces gave her a few last words of advice, explained the system of the pass-book of the Artists' Federation : the sixpenny stamp to be stuck in the little square every week ; the extra stamp at each death of a member, for the benefit of the heirs. They talked to her of the Friday meetings at Manchester, at

which every artiste can speak and see himself printed afterwards in the London *Performer*.

"Good!" thought Lily. "I may have things to say. There will be news for somebody!"

The Graces had a "three-years'-book," the professional *agenda*, with nothing but Mondays marked on it for the weekly engagement: 8 January, 15 January and so on. . . .

"Yes, I know," said Lily. "Mine's full for months ahead!"

They showed her, on theirs, the last pages, containing portrait advertisements of famous artistes: the Pawnees, Marjutti, Laurence.

"Oh, if I could get there one day!" thought Lily. "I'd post it to Pa; it would be the death of him!"

And then followed the thousand-and-one details of the wandering life: your name on the red list, the list handed in at the station; the journeys at reduced fares; the music for twelve instruments, forty executants, sent on to the theatre a fortnight in advance.

"And matinées are paid for now. And you know, Lily, in the Federation you can get a solicitor free."

"That's a good thing to know," thought Lily, "for my divorce with that rusty biker!"

Oh, how she hated pros now! The sight of them in the corridor, looking at her with glistening eyes, made her want to put out her tongue at them! But she preferred not to see:

"I don't like to seem stuck-up with them, it's not polite," she observed.

Nevertheless, she shrugged her shoulders when one of them, who, no doubt, had known her when she was "that high," blew kisses to her from his finger-tips, with a gesture as though to aim them straight at her heart, through the window.

And the train rushed on, rushed on. They were nearing Warrington. The slopes, on either side, bristled with

chimneys and houses, houses, endless roofs . . . Lancashire, rid of its black smoke, like an extinct and silent crater . . . Warrington !

A few minutes' wait. There was a general hustle, pros stretching their legs, running to the refreshment-room for a drink, some seeking seats in the train, others saying good-bye :

"Write to me, eh ? Cathedral Hotel, Melbourne."

And a shake of the hand—"So long !"—perhaps for ever. More basket trunks were being trundled down the platform. A wife was leaving her husband : six months, twelve months, without meeting ; who could tell ? Or else, perhaps, between two trains, as the luck of the tours would have it ; and they seemed fond of each other, too : Lily thought it very pretty. But she had other things to do than sentimentalizing. She handed out her parcels to Glass-Eye and then, standing on the platform, said good-bye to the Three Graces :

"Hope you'll have a good journey ! *Au revoir !* Send me some post-cards," said Lily. "Address them to the theatre, I love that ! Good-bye ! Ta-ta !"

The train started. Lily waved her handkerchief to the Three Graces.

One more separation ; one more little rent : Lily had had so many in her life. As far back as she could remember there had been heads at the carriage-window, like that ; ships standing out to sea ; trains rushing into the night. But, this time, she was alone, with her maid. And she drew herself up proudly, like a lady who had a sense of her responsibilities. A new life was opening before Lily, as before a girl just coming out. Poor Lily, a girl still, in her way, yes, with, for her portion, a feather in her hat, a golliwog in her trunk, a pair of twinkling legs and nerves of steel, unerring and exact, trained to turn round and round. . . .



## II

"LIVERPOOL! Come along, Glass-Eye!" said Lily, jogging her maid in the ribs.

Glass-Eye, half asleep, clumsily gathered up her parcels, while Lily looked round for the baggage-man. On the platform was an avalanche of bags, boxes, picture-frames, as at the departure from Euston; the basket trunks were being piled up in the theatre-vans. Lily pointed out her hamper and her bike to the boy from the theatre, who had come to meet the "programme" at the station.

"Are you the bicyclist?"

"I am," replied Lily, modestly.

She gave her address: not the pros' boarding-house, but private "digs" which had been recommended to her in London, with a note of introduction. Then she walked out of the station, followed by Glass-Eye.

Lily knew Liverpool, vaguely, as she knew all the towns of the United Kingdom and those of America, too, and Australia and India and Germany and Holland and elsewhere. They were all muddled up in her memory, she had seen so many, and made as it were one great city, but for occasional salient points, as in the towns which you came to in a boat, or those in which you had a circus parade, or others still, here and there: Glasgow, where she had fallen and broken a tooth; Blackpool, with its ball-rooms, its tower; Sheffield, with its smoking chimneys; Washington, with a dome at the end; New York, with its skyscrapers. The towns of her early childhood, leaning

against mountains, buried under trees, were more remote, more like a dream: elephants, monkeys, harnessed buffaloes; and then Mexico and Ave Maria, London and those footy rotters!

Liverpool was Lime Street: Lily remembered a sort of round church; when you got to that, you turned to the left. She soon found the house and received from a huge, full-blown lady the friendly welcome which Lily's artless air and fair curls always ensured her. No gentleman with them? All alone by themselves? A room with a big double bed, a little parlour with a bow-window; sixteen shillings a week, including the use of the kitchen. Just then, the baggage-man arrived, took the trunk up to the room and went on with the bike to the pros' boarding-house and the theatre. Lily, assisted by Glass-Eye, fixed herself up for the week: her dresses on the pegs, her linen safe under lock and key in the hamper. Then she made a special parcel of things for the stage: paper flowers, ostrich-feathers, white laced boots.

"There, wrap that up in my petticoat," said Lily. "And the music and my goliwog: you can bring all that to my dressing-room to-morrow morning."

Next, Lily made herself look smart, freshened up her bows, threw her green muslin scarf over her shoulders and went down to the parlour to pick out her favourite tune—*The Bluebells of Scotland*—with one finger on the piano. Meanwhile, the landlady spread the cloth: bread, marmalade, watercress, two eggs. Then, according to instructions received, Glass-Eye announced to Miss Lily that tea was "quite ready." Lily affably invited Glass-Eye to sit down to table with her; and the two ate away like friends. Lily took the opportunity to settle her expenses: for instance—and this she insisted upon—if she, Lily, took a maid, she wouldn't have her for nothing; she intended to pay her some small monthly wage:

"And a good many little perquisites besides, you understand, Glass-Eye ; my old frocks, my hats."

Glass-Eye did not ask so much as that, would have given her other eye to serve Miss Lily.

Lily was still asleep, at twelve o'clock the next morning, when Glass-Eye entered the room. She had lost her way, had walked miles, had been to the landing-stage instead of the music-hall . . .

"At what time's rehearsal ?" asked Lily.

"At one o'clock, Miss Lily."

"And you let me sleep till twelve, when I have so much to do !" said Lily. "Go and get breakfast ready . . . or you'd better mind yourself !"

And Lily put out her arm to lay hold of a boot ; but Glass-Eye was gone.

Lily, while dressing, reflected upon her new responsibilities, upon the way in which servants should be treated. No familiarity ; not too severe, either ; and no smackings . . . that is to say . . . However . . .

"I must dress her simply," thought Lily. "My hats, but without the feathers ; coarse thread gloves ; and she must always carry a parcel."

Lily was eager to go to rehearsal, accompanied by her maid. There is no rehearsing at "rehearsal : " the "times," the scenic effects are settled with the conductor of the band ; there are no bare arms or bloomers practising on their carpets : a few dark groups, in ordinary walking-dress ; others, in their shirt sleeves, are opening boxes ; and no mystery, no shifting lights : the stage and the house one wan hole, except the red and gold note of the curtain and the black mass of the musicians, with the gleaming brasses.

The artistes went up to the conductor, one after the other, and explained their "turns : "

"When I come on, this tune, soft, six times, to begin

with ; then, once, loud. When I go off, a roll of drums."

The band, each time, played two or three bars, mechanically, at sight ; then it was understood and . . . next, please.

Lily had seen this before, but not under these conditions ; not dressed as at present ; not accompanied by a maid. She listened as hard as she could when she walked on to the stage, caught the remarks, enjoyed the impression which she produced. They seemed to ask :

" Who is it ? A singer ? A dancer ? "

" No, Lily ; Miss Lily, you know. "

She guessed all that. Then :

" My score, Maud ! "

And, leaning towards the orchestra, she explained, in her turn : pizzicati, mazurka, frog, swan, back-wheel, the waltz for the twirls, the march for the exit. And Lily withdrew with a half-curtsey and a pretty smile. Next, she put out her things in her dressing-room, on the table, before the looking-glass : brushes, pencils, grease-paints, strings of pearls for her hair. She hung a cord from the door to the window, to dry her tights on, when she washed a pair in the basin. She got out her little work-box, in case of anything tearing, threaded a needle, freshened up the knots of her ribbons, pinned photos and p.-c.'s on the wall. And, over all, she hung her gollywog, a hairy doll, white-collared, red-waistcoated, with, in its black face, under the bristling hair, two shining tacks by way of eyes. It was the protecting idol. Not that Lily, a faithful daughter of the Church of England, believed much in gollywogs ; but, like most music-hall people, she felt safer when she knew it was there. And her dressing-room, with the spangled skirts and the tights hanging down like flayed skins, suggested some strange, exotic chapel in which a fetish sat enthroned.

After that, Lily had nothing left to do. She went out with Glass-Eye and walked round to the front to look at her lithos. She saw to her annoyance that a serio was topping the bill and a comic singer middling it and a cinematograph bottoming it. But no matter, she had a good place, just under the bill-topper.

Next came shopping, mostly through the windows. She bought a pair of thread gloves for Glass-Eye at Lewis's and then went in and lay on her bed, feeling ever so tired from getting up late that morning. She dreamed and dreamed, while Glass-Eye went marketing. As soon as Lily was alone, the thought pricked her like a pin: "looking pretty," indeed! Her "gentlemen friends!" Jimmy, that traitor, and Trampy! Trampy would be sure to play her some dirty trick. Oh, if she could get a divorce from him, in spite of all! She had asked about it in London. She would want a solicitor. She must have one, to set enquiries on foot . . . She could have as many witnesses as she pleased: all those girls . . . and the stage hands . . . and those two artistes, on the day when Trampy, in his fury, had flung his bike at her on the stairs; the pedal had grazed her temple, yes, at Dresden. That wasn't the way to treat a lady. Everything that had happened was his fault; and they'd see who'd win the day, he or she. Her forehead wrinkled up with anger; she bit her lips and clenched her fists and then . . . and then . . . enough of that! She'd see to-morrow. And other cares came to bother her: the indispensable things which she would have to buy at the end of the week out of her salary; open-work stockings, an aigrette for the theatre, a little black bog-oak pig to wear at her wrist. And Jimmy's thousand marks. . . .

"Damn it, let him wait!"

And, with her hand on her lucky charm, Lily fell asleep.

In the evening, at the theatre, she forgot everything. She felt a longing, a fevered desire to appear. When her turn came, after the xylophonists, who seemed, behind their tables laden with wooden bottles, to be keeping a bar of musical sounds; when the light shining on the great back-drop threw into dazzling relief the blue sea, the blue sky and the white colonnade and terraces; when, amid the flash of the lime-light and the thunder of the orchestra, she made her entrance on the stage, Lily had a smile of triumph. Life was beginning for her at last! She could have cried out for happiness to that human mass which, behind the flaming streak of the footlights, spread itself, bare-necked and bedizened, in the warm shadow of the front boxes. And she darted a scarlet smile, set off with a glint of gold, at the audience.

"I believe I was grand to-night," said Lily, as she went off, out of breath. "Oh, if there had been an agent in the house! But no such luck: they're never there when they're wanted! And those two fellows!" she thought to herself. "If they had been there, they'd have died of jealousy."

Everybody spoilt her. She needed a strong head to resist the flatteries with which she was overwhelmed, both as artiste and woman. For instance, when a row of Roofers were puffing away on the stage, some manager, who had known her when she was that high, was sure to observe that her talent, her firm, round hips—"Eh, Lily, you've got plenty of that now, what?" Lily blushed under the compliment—her hips and her talent would make more impression than a whole herd of Roofers:

"Eh, Lily? I say, what are you doing to-night? Come and have some. . . ."

"Glass-Eye, my handkerchief," Lily broke in, suspecting an invitation to supper.

Glass-Eye, in obedience to a gesture of Lily's, opened

the wrist-bag, gave Lily the lace handkerchief and Lily hid her mocking smile in a scented gesture. Then :

“ Good-bye. Ta-ta ! ”

And they shook hands, like good friends, nothing more.

Glass-Eye frightened off the admirers with her fixed stare. And Lily had no lack of them. She loved flirting. She wanted adulation, wanted to be made much of. She had a revenge to take, arrears to make up ; she and affection had, till then, been strangers. She now took her fill of it, got carried away, saw nothing but lovers around her, three or four at a time, as when the comic quartette, the Out-of-Tunes, used to grin kisses to her in the street. It was for her that they were there, every one of them, down to the acting-managers, who did not disdain to come round from the front and take a turn on the stage. It might be a question of steam-pipes or electric wires ; no matter, Lily took it all to herself, made herself amiable towards their dress-coats and white shirt-fronts and said “ ‘ K you ! ” with the great stage bow, the body bent in a sweeping curtsey, when they complimented her on her firm, round hips. She stabbed them with smiles, to make sure of eulogistic phrases in their weekly reports to the central boards. All of them, all of them—the electrician, the conductor of the band—she had them all at her feet. It became a need for Lily to see people all around her dying for love. It gave her a feeling of mingled pride and remorse.

“ Can I help it, Glass-Eye ? ” she would ask, to quiet her conscience. “ They’re mad. They would leave their wives and children for me ! ”

She had an autograph album filled with “ thoughts ” and declarations :

“ I love you ! . . . *Je vous aime !* . . . *Ich liebe dich !* ” . . .

Lily, now that the audience was good for invitations to supper, bouquets and sweets, occupied herself with that sombre mass which, formerly, did not cause her so much uneasiness as the presence of her Pa. Lily, like a real stage-girl, who had beheld waves "miles high" between Harwich and the Hook of Holland, saw in a few flowers a bouquet-large enough to fill a cab; and the least little love-letter grew, in her eyes, into an offer to present her with motor-cars and to abandon wife and child. If a gentleman, for once in a way, stood on the pavement waiting for her, she dreamt of an elopement. And there were pros, too, who prowled around her in the half-light of the wings and came up to her with outstretched hand :

"Hullo, Mrs. Trampy!"

"Call me Miss Lily," she said, in a vexed voice. "That's the name I'm known by."

And many of them did know her, in fact, from having talked about her in Fourteenth Street, New York, or in State Street, Sydney, or in the theatres in South Africa; for that story of the whippings had travelled round the world, under the folds of the Union Jack. Some of them proposed to take her with them in their show, or to go with her to clean her bike, instead of Glass-Eye :

"Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, I *don't* think!" said Lily.

Another, just off for Melbourne, told her that, in Australia, you could find fire-escapes to marry you for half a crown. They joked without constraint, in the pros' smoking-room, a small dark corner between the house and the stage; they tried to monkey-claw her; but Lily spoilt their game by sitting down on the stairs. She had every one of them, the pros, at her feet; but she didn't care for that sort and sent them to eat coke.

The months all passed alike. She had finished the Bill and Boom Tour. She continued in the private music-



halls, from north to south, from east to west of England. In spite of Glass-Eye's impossible cooking and the everlasting ham-sandwiches and pork-pies of the railway-station refreshment-rooms, Lily grew plumper and plumper; her nervous leanness filled out, with pigeon-eggs, with ostrich-eggs everywhere, in front and behind. She did not kill herself with work. Once, in Glasgow, at a music-hall where, a few weeks earlier, Laurence had had a terrible fall, lying unconscious for two whole hours, the frightened manager said:

"No dangerous tricks, mind! They get us into trouble."

Lily took advantage of this to suppress her head-on-the-saddle business. Another time, she was given only seven minutes, watch in hand, on the stage.

"Couldn't you cut that little trick? You know the one I mean," said the manager.

He called a little trick a performance which it had cost her eighteen months' hard practice and no end of thumps in the ribs to learn. Lily did not wait to be asked twice. She cut as desired and thought it a jolly lot easier to trot round quietly, as though out for a ride, with pretty smiles to the audience. She ended by paying more attention to her dresses than to her work:

"It's not so much what one does," she said, "as the way one does it."

The love with which she was surrounded unmanned the Spartan in her. She strove to please, no longer gave her performance for herself, like a machine, unerring and exact. Already, in a few months, she was spoilt. She looked for adventitious successes. She said, "The audience is very cold at Birmingham," because she was not asked out to supper, and, "They do like artistes at Sheffield, gee!" because a gentleman had sent her champagne and flowers in her dressing-room.

In the towns where she played three times a day—a

matinée and two night turns—she gave only half of her performance, cut whatever was dangerous or tiring. She never practised now ; just went down in the morning to fetch her letters at the theatre, where she loved receiving them, post-cards especially, which any one could read. She said to the jossers :

“ Send me lots ; talk about motor-cars and champagne-suppers : that drives the pros wild.”

She left them lying on the table, or else walked about on the stage, with her letters in her hand, like a lady overwhelmed with offers, with invitations. If, by any chance, she went to the practice at the end of the week, it was to display her hat, her new boots ; and she laughed to herself when she saw the artistes, each on his carpet, fagging away like mad. She felt like a fine lady visiting a boarding-school, among those little girls practising their flip-flaps or gluing themselves to the wall to try their back-bendings. The pride of a Marjutti, who, they said, tortured her spinal column to achieve a double knot ; the inordinate ambition of a Laurence, risking her life for the pleasure of risking it, were things she did not understand. And then all those accidents ! Dolly Pawnee, the other day, had broken her arm at the New York Hippodrome ; the Gilson girl had fallen on her head at Buda-Pest. They were mad, thought Lily, to do all that without being obliged to ! No, no ; no more of that for her ! The last thing she wanted was to spoil her face, seeing that she had nothing but her smile to keep her. And Lily grew timid, looked upon herself more and more as a very precious little thing. She gave herself terrible airs on rehearsal day ; thought the stage too slippery, or too small. Lily wanted a stage thirty feet wide, no less ; she who, in the old days, at a gesture from Pa, would have performed her whole turn, including the head-on-the-saddle, on the top of a cab or on the Stoke Newington

pavement. Formerly, she used to think everything good, did not know what fatigue meant ; now, in the middle of her turn, she would say to herself, sometimes with a feeling of discouragement :

" I've only done half. I've still got this and that to do."

And the audience itself seemed to act as her confederate. When she missed one of her tricks, Lily would lay her bike on the stage, step down to the footlights, bow with a confused air, beg pardon with a smile and receive a reassuring round of applause. Lily loved these refined audiences : *her* audiences, as she said ; not the *matinée* audiences, with seats at reduced prices : to see your grocer or your butcher in the front boxes was rotten ; and those people gave themselves such airs. A cheap way of doing the grand !

And the landladies spoilt her, too ; those worthy souls who treated her as their own daughter.

" And a jolly sight better ! " thought Lily.

Others pitied her for the profession she followed, feared she would break something, one fine day. Lily thought that very sweet of them, would have liked to stay with them for ever ; but there was the constant rent at parting, a bit of herself which Lily left behind her every week. And the bothers that Maud caused her ! Her stupidity drove Lily mad : tickets lost, bags mislaid, disputes with the tradesmen, battles with the bike, scratches on the shins, on the hands, everywhere. Lily lost patience, threatened her with the leather belt, damn it !

Sometimes, Lily became incensed with herself and everybody. Her divorce kept running in her head. And her three-years'-book, with its last pages unsoiled by engagements, also gave her cause for uneasiness. And yet the acting-managers must have sung her praises in their weekly reports : the ones who came and made love to her on the stage !

After different music-halls, she had done the Kellermann Tour, but without any great success. People who had known her with the troupe thought that she had gone off. Lily was furious : if, on those evenings, she missed a trick, she would knock Glass-Eye about when she returned to the wings, storm at the stage—"Slippery as ice, damn it!"—fling her bike, which was not to blame, against the wall. Lily, in her pink tights, under the pendants of false pearls on her forehead, looked like an angry savage, ready to fly at your throat.

That was her life. No adventures, really ; theatres in which she caught on, theatres in which she didn't go down so well ; more or less prolonged applause ; an encore or two ; and, here and there, a bouquet large enough to fill a cab : these were the great events. And it was always the same show, on the same stage, from one end of England to the other ; theatres and theatres ; so many theatres that, in her memory, they ended, like the towns, by making only one. It was always herds of Roofers, swaying in unison, with flaxen wigs, scarlet legs, boyish voices ; and "families," "sisters," "brothers," all different, but all alike, going up the staircase to their dressing-rooms in wraps, like gouty patients at a spa, and serious, serious, with choruses emphasized by dances. . . . Sometimes, a new attraction, a Venus without tights, or a bare-breasted Salome, would draw whole groups, boys and girls mixed, to the wings, with their necks stretched towards the stage. And there were exotic features, too : conjurers from Malabar ; boomerang-throwing bushmen ; Light of Asia, a Chinese girl without arms, a foot-juggler, an artificial product, like those beggar-monsters whom they cultivate in pots in the mountains of Navarre. Lily saw the boy-violinist again. Since that bite in the seat of his trousers, at Buda-Pest, he had abandoned all hope of fame and was looking for an engagement in the orchestra.

She saw the female-impersonator with the green eyes. She saw numbers and numbers. She ended by seeing them all again, in the various greenrooms. She heard names mentioned. People were coming on all round : Tom, singing-girls, dancing-girls. She would have to do something too, after all, to get herself talked about ! She had received a shock on opening *The Era* : they had not taken out her name ! There was still a Miss Lily at Rathbone Place : her cousin Daisy, it appeared, a stranger, was there in her stead, under her name ! And they were stealing her idea ! The New Zealanders were now called the New Trickers : no doubt, it was the turn which she had described to Pa. Something new, something new was essential. She *must* manage to hit on something ! She turned it all over in her head. There were too many Lilies, Lilians, Lillians ; you saw nothing but Lillians on the posters. But what about a Lilia Godiva, quite naked on her bike, like the other on her horse ! She would mimic the scene, love and despair, and she would think of something to raise a laugh ! Peeping Tom, for instance, stretching out his neck and stealing a kiss as she passed. Oh, she would find a way—trust her !—of showing them what she had in her ! And Jimmy and Trampy pursued her incessantly with their hateful memory. Trampy, she was told, was still the darling of the fair.

Lily was greatly astonished that he had not tried to obtain a divorce, on his side :

“ He’s afraid,” she said to herself.

More than ever, she busied herself with collecting her witnesses ; she would soon be rid for good of her tramp-cyclist.

People also talked about Jimmy, whose reputation was still increasing. After a triumphant season at the Hippodrome, he had left for America. Jimmy was becoming a national champion. An article in *The Era* spoke of “ our Jimmy.”

"He's a friend of yours, Lily," people said. "You ought to know all about him."

Lily tossed her head, like one who could say a great deal, if she would. . . .

Oh, how she longed for revenge when she thought of Jimmy and Trampy both! Oh, if she could only have served them out somehow! If she could get *The Performer Annual* to send her those questions to answer: "Q. Your favourite town? Your favourite audience? Your idea of marriage? Your pet aversion?" wouldn't she give it them hot, just! She thought of having her biography written, the real one. She herself sometimes jotted down things she remembered, on bits of paper, on the backs of envelopes, in her dressing-room; arranged her picture post-cards in order; called that writing her memoirs. She would crush them with her successes, give names and dates: that lord who wanted to travel with her, the fifty-pound diamond brooch he had given her. And bouquets, chocolates, sweets . . . by the cart-load! That stage-manager who cried when she went away! All, all in love with her: yes, those and ever so many more!

She had so much to say that she did not know where to begin. She knocked up against too many people, men and women, without counting monkeys, parrots, dogs, cats, ponies, elephants; it all ended by getting mixed up in her head, like the theatres and the towns. She grew quite bewildered, among so many different things. She had seen everything and done everything. Once, during a week when she was "resting," she had helped her landlady, who kept a public-house, to draw the beer and had waited on the customers, with her fifty-pound diamond brooch at her throat. At a benefit performance, one night, when they were drinking champagne on the stage, actors, singers, artistes, all together, her pink tights had

excited the dress-coats. Lily had been "pressed in company," that is to say, surrounded till she did not know which way to turn, while her time was pretty well taken up with saying, "Paws off!" before, behind, on every side. She had triumphed at galas, above a tumult of heads and parasols: at Roundhay Park, among other places, beneath the motto, "Let Leeds flourish!" Feeling anxious about her future, she had consulted a "Zanzig" at Earl's Court. Each week brought its surprises, its fresh knowledge. Lily learnt something every day: "If you see a lamb in the fields with its head turned towards you, that's lucky; if you see its tail first, it's a sign of bad luck;" and the way of holding your hands, of placing your fingers, of whispering certain words in certain circumstances.

She collected halfpennies with holes in them. In Ireland, she had kissed the Blarney stone and picked shamrock in the ruins. She had dropped her little mother-of-pearl hunchback in the labyrinth of underground passages at the Blackpool Tower Circus. The loss of this lucky charm had damped her spirits for a week. And her profits were small and her "exes" constantly increasing: tips to the call-boy, who cleaned her bike; tips to the stage-manager; half-crowns and five shillings in every direction. As soon as she had put a trifle by, a week without an engagement made her hard-up again. Though she travelled at reduced fares and contented herself with a ham-sandwich or a slice of pork-pie on the road, she would never, never be able to repay Jimmy that money: she had not even paid Glass-Eye yet! Her dresses for on and off the stage swallowed up everything. And yet she couldn't go about naked, like Lady Godiva!

And time passed and passed. Lily was growing *old*: she was eighteen! There were girls of her age who were already beyond work, used up, like that girl contortionist

who had just been cut open for a tumour ; and Lily had as yet achieved nothing ! Oh, she ought to have signed for America or Australia ; or else for Russia, of which she had heard wonders—Poland, the Parisienne, had just returned from there covered with diamonds—theatres that played all night and did not close till dawn, to the clicking of champagne-glasses. Lily dreamt of it, ecstatically : England was no good to her now. The New Trickers, with their own cheap Lily, were working her idea on the Bill and Boom Tour ! If only she could have the continent ! They were talking of a new music-hall which Kellermann was to open in Paris. He meant to make a palace of it, they said, and he was also stretching out his arm toward Antwerp, Cologne, Lyons, Marseilles, a continental trust. . . .

“ That’s what I ought to have,” thought Lily.

Her present life seemed empty, notwithstanding its excitement : it was like the sound of a band ; nothing remained of it. But for Glass-Eye’s company, she would have cried, sometimes, for sheer melancholy, as at the sight of those really loving couples in the boarding-houses, on the stage itself ; those babies in the arms of their Mas ; it made her heart ache ; the thought of it pursued her like the call of distant bells, while the train rushed into the darkness. . . .



### III

" May joy and pleasure be your lot  
As through this world you trot, trot, trot.

" X."

" In the golden chain of friendship, regard me as a link.  
" LOVING PAL (Palace, Sheffield)."

THERE were pages and pages like this in Lily's autograph book. The last was that of a couple of friends, the dark one and the fair one :

" May success always follow you, and eventually a good fellow collar you, is the sincere wish of the

" SISTERS VIOLET AND NANCY—The Ideal Pair (of legs!)."

Since Miss Lily's arrival in Paris, her collection had been increased by the addition of a fervent declaration from her friend the architect. This had been her welcome in Paris : the "good fellow," no doubt, prophesied by the ideal pair of legs ; yes, she had hardly reached Paris and already there were people dying of love around her, already a man at her feet.

Lily was delighted to meet this sincere friend again, a friend of her childhood, who, she said, had known her when she was "that high : " one poor devil the more ready to leave wife and children for her sake. The evening before, in her dressing-room at the Bijou Theatre, she had told him the story of her life since leaving her parents. It made her forget to ask about Kellermann and the new theatre which he was to open : was it ready ? The

architect ought to know better than anybody. She would ask him to-night. And Lily lay turning this over, in the morning, in bed, notwithstanding her other cares, for she must get clear somehow, must see the agents that afternoon. She had plenty to do beside her turn. She had to busy herself with those thousand-and-one details. . . . She would never have believed that it was so hard to fill her three-years'-book. Lily felt half-dead with fatigue before she started :

"Let me sleep!" said Lily, stretching herself in the big double bed which Glass-Eye had just left. "Clear out! Let me sleep!"

But Glass-Eye made a rush at Lily, tickled her in the neck, stifled her laughter under the pillow: it was a necessity for them in the morning, those few minutes of horse-play, of thumps and smacks, which rang out on every side. Lily, at last, full-throated, with fluttering nostrils, cried out for mercy. The maid went off, Lily, now quite awake, remained alone and her worries returned: no more love, no more music, as at the theatre, no more purple rays, nothing but gloomy hours, a long day stretching out before her like a grey corridor. It was real life now: letters to write, costumes to mend, last night's tights to wash in the basin. . . . Lily, sitting on the edge of her bed, took her purse from where she had hidden it under the bolster—a habit she had acquired in marriage, because of Trampy's nightly ferretings—and emptied it on the sheets: one blue banknote; one, two, three gold coins. What did that make in pounds, shillings and pence? Hardly seven pounds. It was all very well for her to economize, like that Ma of a star, who counted the potatoes. It was all very well for her to stint in every way, keeping back Glass-Eye's wages for over a year, saying that she would pay her in a lump: she would have almost nothing left after the purchases which she had to make.

It was true that, to-morrow, she would receive her fortnight's pay; and she hoped for a renewal. She felt sure of it, if only because of the way in which the manager had taken her by the chin. Then a fortnight at the Brussels Alhambra . . . 1 November: Flora, Amsterdam . . . 10 January: Copenhagen . . . and, for the rest, her three-years'-book was empty and each empty page represented months without work; all her profits would be swallowed up by her enforced idleness. She would never clear herself, never be able to pay Jimmy. Oh, she was furious with him because she could not discharge her debt to him once and for all, fling his money in his face, show him if people remained penniless long when they had her talent! That idea comforted Lily. And it was important that she should look nice to-day, to go the round of the agents. Lily dressed quickly, cunningly puffed out her bows, a trick she had learned as a child, and then, before putting on her dress, cooked the food with Glass-Eye, who had just come in with her parcels.

Then a dash of scent on the handkerchief, a touch of rouge on the lips and, leaving the room all untidy, she went down, followed by Glass-Eye, rigged out in a pair of thread mittens and carrying the sunshade and the wrist-bag. Quick, quick! For Lily knew by experience that it is well to be the first at the agent's or else there's nothing for you.

She did not dislike those walks through Paris:

"Let's have some fun," she said to Glass-Eye.

By this, Lily meant laughing at "those tiny Frenchies;" and, if they ventured to accost her, crushing them with a "*Vous hettes oun cochong!*" Although, among the people she mixed with, agents, artistes, stage hands, everybody spoke English, Lily had not come to Paris without learning a few words, "*Oui . . . Non . . . Vous hettes oun cochong!*" and so on, which were indispensable, she thought, to a girl who wanted to make herself respected

on the continent, a girl alone, especially. And she loved to snub those damned parley-voos who dared to accost ladies. It seemed to lighten those days of visits to the agents, the very prospect of which gave her a headache in advance, because one had to think of everything : lithos, photos, programmes ; and, if the agent wasn't in, ruin one's self in correspondence ; and puff one's self in every way, rub it into them that one was the cleverest person on earth :

" If you're too modest," said Lily, " they'll take you at your word ! "

And the pay would drop, in consequence.

" Never tell your salary ! " was another of Lily's favourite maxims.

She gave out that she made heaps, that a little star like her, the Marie Lloyd of the bike, was only to be obtained for untold gold. But, at the agent's, she had to cut her prices : there was no hiding anything from them ; it was like going to the doctor.

" And, when you're in work, everybody wants you ; and, when you're out of work, they have nothing for you : it's help yourself as best you may ! " she said.

She had to help herself now ; and it was delicate business dealing with people who have but one idea, to swindle you, in order to curry favour with the managers by getting them cheap turns. They would have skinned you alive :

" Two pounds a week. Do you accept ? "

" Go to Halifax ! " Lily would reply, in such cases, looking them straight in the face.

It took a certain courage to do that : the agent might grow bigger, might become an enemy any day. She didn't care ! She wasn't going to lower her price for anybody ! And the commission she had to pay them was a torment to Lily ; calculating the percentage made her head split. Not to speak of the complicated nature

of the contracts, worse than insurance-policies. The poor artiste was bound down on every side, at the mercy of the manager ; everything was provided for, down to the prohibition of black tights, which concealed one's poverty. And it was bad enough in England, but in the Dago countries, on the continent, it was worse.

" Can you understand a word of it, Glass-Eye ? " asked Lily, explaining to her maid the tricks which the artiste had to fight against. " I don't know how the small turns manage," she concluded, in the tone of a woman who towers above all that.

Lily's prettiness made the people in the street turn round to look at her. They would gaze at her cheeky feather, whisper, " You pretty, pretty darling ! " in her ear. Lily, secretly delighted, held herself ready to crush the saucy rascal with a " How dare you ? " like a lady who knows how to appreciate a compliment, without permitting the least familiarity. And, when she approached an agency, she insisted on Glass-Eye's keeping by her side, asked for things : her wrist-bag, her embroidered handkerchief. And her way of walking in ! Lily pretended to be short-sighted, so as to see no one in the rotten lot. She sent in her card, sat down in the waiting-room. It reminded her of the dentist's, with those pale people sitting on benches, those serio-comics all over fat, those loud-voiced topical singers, who took the place of the real artistes, just like the bioscopes and cinematographs !

There were also little families, small turns that had struggled hard to learn a few tricks : nobody wanted them, because they had no smart costumes, sometimes, or no lithos. . . . These were received like dogs : a wretched couple were just coming out, a man and a woman, sad with a humility accustomed to rebuffs ; and the agent drove them to the door with his voice :

"Eccentric mashers? No opening for you. Call again!"

Lily got a good reception in the agent's room; but there was nothing for her. And the agent saw her to the door, with a satisfied air and a knowing wink, as though to make the others believe . . . Lily didn't like that kind—her short-sightedness did not prevent her noticing it and blushing at it—but she was very pleased, all the same, to be seen to the door, before those small turns who were received like dogs. . . .

On the pavement outside, the wretched couple came up to her shyly :

"Don't you know us, Miss Lily? The Para-Paras."

She had to listen to a pitiful tale. She heard nothing but that, when she went on her rounds of visits to the agents. Oh, the distress which she beheld there! It made Lily feel quite ill at night. A little more and she would have said her prayers, before getting into bed, to thank God that she hadn't come to that. Poor Paras! Starving, no doubt, remaining for weeks in their garret, pretending that they had been performing in the provinces or abroad. . . . Lily pictured them passing the stage-doorkeepers to whom they had sold their parrots and being greeted with a "What's for breakfast, Polly?"

"Miss Lily," they confessed, in a whisper, "you know such a lot of people: if ever you hear of anything for us, never mind where . . ."

"Poor beggars!" thought Lily.

And her Ma, who had prophesied to her that, one day, she would be worse off than they! No, she would never be half so badly off! Why, she could have had anything she wanted, motor-cars, Paris gowns, for the asking!

"Glass-Eye, my bag!" And, handing a small gold coin to the wretched couple, "There . . . between artistes, you know . . . give it back when you can; good-bye.

Did you notice, Glass-Eye," asked Lily, as she walked away, "how flattered they were when I said, 'Between artistes?' They looked quite touched."

But there was no time to waste in nonsense, on a day when she was calling on the agents. The thing was to get there first; and Lily consulted her addresses. . . .

She was exasperated at being obliged, with her talent, to climb all those stairs, to hang about in the waiting-room, she, Lily Clifton! And it reeked of vice, stank with the trashy scent of the "not-up-to-muchies": merely to look at them suggested faces seen in Piccadilly at night or in the Burlington Arcade.

Lily sent in her card, threw a short-sighted glance around her and remained standing, like a lady who is never kept waiting and who is sure to be received at once. And, with her head bent down and her chin in her gold-spotted tie, she turned over the pages of *Le Courrier des Cafés Concerts* on the table . . . names which she didn't know . . . the small "numbers" of the continent . . . so much the better . . . all the more chance for her. But the engagement which she dreamt of did not offer this time either. What the agent did propose to her, almost without lowering his voice, with the door open, before everybody, was the grated private boxes of South America . . . the private rooms of Russia . . . accompanied, at a startled movement on Lily's part, by this concession:

"You needn't sleep there, you know!"

To talk like that to a lady! Lily felt stifled. Was that what she had learnt the bike for? To exhibit herself after the show, at the customers' disposal? Lily could have vomited on the stairs, as she went down:

"One of those!" she said. "Not I!"

And she continued her weary pilgrimage of stairs, from agent to agent:

"I must have six months filled up in my book before

to-night!" she said, determined to visit them all, small and big, rather than go back empty-handed.

There were some who suggested to her that ten per cent. was really very little. . . .

"I like their style!" thought Lily. "They want an extra sop thrown to them: one might as well work for nothing!"

She thanked them, nevertheless, so as not to make enemies of them: one never knows . . . and the agent doesn't matter so much; but the assistant, who happens to have known you when you were "that high" . . . better give him a tip, lest he should round on you.

She also saw a former artiste, a friend of Pa's, who had become an agent:

"Miss Lily? Lily Clifton? What are you doing now? Won't you see my secretary? Leave your address with him."

"Fellows whom Pa helped!" she grumbled, angrily, as she went down the stairs. "They're the worst of all! They make you pay for the humiliation of their own failure on the stage!"

Presently, she came to an agent who practised almost in the street, in a kind of public arcade: an agent for everything . . . circus, music-hall, theatre . . . artistes formed in a week . . . white flesh at famine salaries. There were all sorts of people there, a swarming heap of frayed velvet and shabby plush. Lily passed by with great dignity. Next, she came to the big agent, with offices in Berlin and London . . . the ting-ting of telephones, the tick-tack of typewriters all day long . . . business pure and simple, an exchange for supple loins, swelling biceps, muslin skirts, pigeon-eggs . . . a sheaf of stars who, from there, radiated over Australia, America, England, the Eastern and Western Trusts, Bill and Boom, Kellermann, the continent. Lily felt a little ill at ease



as she entered—she had a pain at the pit of her stomach, as when she used to expect a smacking—and again in the private office crammed with papers and registers, alone with the agent, who looked at her card, he seated, she standing. Then, suddenly :

“ Lily ? Miss Lily ? Your price is two hundred francs a week, I believe.”

“ What ! ” said Lily. “ With a bike and a maid ? ”

“ It’s what you had at Maidstone, so I was told.”

“ What a lie ! ” said Lily. “ Three hundred francs is the lowest I’ve ever had. I’ll show you my contracts.”

“ Don’t trouble,” said the agent. “ I thought . . . we can get plenty at that price, you know . . . in your style. . . . ”

“ In my style, perhaps . . . but not me.”

“ Pooh, the audience doesn’t know the difference ! ” And he started looking through a register, turning over the pages and repeating mechanically, like a refrain or a lullaby, “ The audience doesn’t care a hang ; it’s all the same to the audience.” And, suddenly, with his hand flat on the open book and the other ready to take up the pen, with a piercing eye fixed upon Lily, “ I can give you a month at a thousand francs . . . they want a girl in tights . . . at Lisbon.”

“ Lisbon ? ” said Lily. “ That’s at the Colosseo. A thousand francs to go to the Colosseo, with one’s luggage and a maid ? ”

“ Well ? ” broke in the agent. “ And what do you want a maid for, you extravagant little beast ? Why not your maid’s family, while you’re about it ? A thousand francs : will you take it ? I’ve got some one who will, if you don’t.”

Lily had to say yes or no quickly. Her forehead was wrinkled with the effort of turning the francs into shillings, the shillings into pounds. She consulted her book, like

an artiste who doesn't know, who may not be free, for a whole month. She lowered her chin in her tie, but without smiling . . . had a cramp in her stomach, rather. At a pinch, by leaving Glass-Eye in Paris. . . . After Lisbon, one generally had Madrid and Barcelona and returned by Marseilles and Lyons. Friends of hers had done well like that. But to accept a lower salary once meant accepting it always, in establishments of the same class ; it meant reducing her price, for always, by two pounds a week, at least.

"A thousand francs : will you have it ?"

And Lily :

"No, it's impossible ! I can't take less than twelve pounds a week." And she began to sum up her proofs : "Look here, at the Hippodrome, Glasgow . . . at the Palace, Leeds. . . ."

But the agent wouldn't listen, shut up the register, was sorry :

"Can't do it . . . bad season . . . cyclists to be had for the asking. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

And Lily went out, went down the stairs, feeling half inclined to go back and accept ; but no ! Lower her prices ? Never ! Oh, those cheap artistes, those blacklegs deserved to be hanged ! Great lazybones who learn a few baby tricks on the bike or the tight-rope, back-parlour acrobats, slop-shop Lilies, who practise at a safe distance, by watching you on the stage, through an opera-glass. They cut your prices by half ; they would work for a handful of rice, like a monkey. They deserved to have the iron curtain come down on them and flatten them out like black-beetles, the wind-bags !

"I say, Glass-Eye, perhaps it's they who fell into the orchestra, was it, when I got my thighs full of lamp-glass from the footlights, eh ? They copy you, think

themselves artistes. . . . What ! Yes ? You said they are, Glass-Eye ! Damn it, I'll have your eye out ! ”

And Lily had a fit of laughing when she saw Glass-Eye, who hadn't said a word, raise her elbow in affright to ward off the blow.

Lily held the banister with one hand, leant on Maud's shoulder with the other and laughed and laughed, only to see her maid's terrified face, a regular fat freak shrinking before the belt. My ! She would have fallen with laughing, if Glass-Eye had not held her up ; she plugged her lips with her scented handkerchief, slapped her thighs. She had never laughed so much in her life. She already felt consoled for all her bothers :

“ Watch me, Glass-Eye ! This is the way to go downstairs ! ”

And, nimbly as a bird, Lily hopped on the banister, with her back to the wall, and—w-w-w-w-whew !—slid down to the bottom, keeping her balance faultlessly, sprang to her feet on the last stair and, with a wave of the hand, as after a successful trick :

“ There ! What do you think of that ? ”

Lily was not given to long spells of sadness. Reaction always followed immediately upon her worries, made the thousand-and-one vexations of a day like this easier to bear. The compliments which caught her ear in the street comforted her too :

“ You pretty, pretty ! . . . ”

But she had not time to listen. Six months in her book before night ! As time passed, Lily would have been content with less. And trot, trot, trot, while she was at it ; then she would end by seeing whether they would get her for a handful of rice !

The idea amused her. Lily had confidence in her talent and continued her visits. She saw them all : other agents, former bosses or profs, who had sucked apprentices dry to

the marrow and who continued their evil practices in their offices ; this sort sized you up with the eye of a slave-dealer. There was also the lucky agent, who had started a sensational attraction, a Laurence or a Light of Asia. This agent had a touch of pride about him, with his eternal " I gave her her first start ! " as though to say :

" They'll never find another like her, never ! They don't turn them out like that now ! "

And all this was a pretext for offering you ridiculous terms, because you were neither Light of Asia nor Laurence. It was no use Lily's boasting of having declined Bill and Boom and Kellermann, pretending to be an artiste for whom the managers were competing against one another with sheaves of bank-notes. There was nothing for her at this one's . . . nothing for her at the other's either . . . only a scrap of news of her family, through an artiste. The New Trickers were all the rage in Scotland, it seemed ; an engagement in London, at the Palace, was waiting for them. When Lily heard that, she turned pale with envy : so it was on their account that she had been refused that tour in England, that they might have it ! Patience ! Her day would come . . . when she returned from the continent and, instead of Miss, called herself Mlle., like ever so many others ! Meanwhile, she had found nothing at all. Still, Lily knew that one sometimes had whole months of enforced idleness, without knowing the reason, and then, suddenly, one's luck returned. One only had to wait a bit, thought Lily, making herself very short-sighted as she passed before the arcade, the haunt of the out-at-elbow pros and of the piffing little agents, the jackals of the profession, on the look-out for a bone to gnaw. And it was not a little vexing to hear her name pass from mouth to mouth—" Mrs. Trampy, Mrs. Trampy "—and who could be drawing attention to her in that rotten lot ? Was Trampy there, by any chance, pointing his finger at her ?

She felt inclined to go back to them, to tell them in two words what she thought of them. Mrs. Trampy, indeed ! It was not for long, in any case. Her divorce was not far off !

In the evening, at the theatre, she forgot her bothers, as usual. The day, for that matter, was quite an ordinary one : it was the typical day, the trot, trot, trot of the star alone, in search of engagements. And, thoroughly tired, in her dressing-room, she related in her own way the adventures which she had had since the morning, the compliments on her beauty ; and at the agents', my ! If she had liked, she could have filled up her three-years'-book ! The architect came to see her in her dressing-room, for a moment : such an interesting Lily, he thought, so amusing, as funny, in her way, as Light of Asia, the Chinese girl without arms. Sitting on the big trunk, he admired by turns Lily and the disorderly dressing-table, its cracked looking-glass, scribbled over with names, and, under the glaring light, the grease-paints—red, white, black—the powder-puffs and hare's feet, the biscuits in the tray among the hair-pins, a bottle and glasses beside the powder-box. On the whitewashed walls, scratched all over with inscriptions, covered with pencilled dates, hung rainbow skirts, bodices with metallic flowers. The bike shone in a corner, half-buried under Lily's outdoor clothes. Tights hung beside it, like pink skins, gold spangles strewed the uncarpeted floor and scent hovered over everything. . . . Half-open doors admitted gusts of music from the orchestra ; and Lily, opposite the glass, fumbled among her pots with the tip of her finger, stained her lips blood-red, fixed the rebellious curl to her forehead with a touch of gum. Outside, in the passage, was the row of doors with peep-holes and visiting-cards, half-sheets of paper, stuck down with wafers and bearing the names of the occupants :

"Prof. X. The famous X. Family. Absolutely the best."  
There were others "absolutely the best."

On Lily's door, her card—"Miss Lily"—and, under that, modestly:

"And maid."

Lily revived amid these surroundings; here she forgot her fatigue, blossomed out to her heart's delight. With her rainbow dress, her feathers and her pearl pendants, combined with her elaborate gestures as she made up her face in front of the golliwog, she resembled the officiating priestess of a strange religion, pacifying some angry-eyed idol to the sound of distant choirs.

While finishing her make-up, Lily continued her stories, talked of her successes in England and here and there and everywhere . . . and the lord who wanted to marry her and rained down presents upon her: fifty-pound brooches, diamonds . . . ! Everybody in love with her: to listen to her, you could have followed her traces like the passage of a cyclone . . . men gone mad . . . others blinded through weeping . . . millionaires ruined in chocolates and sweets . . . and flowers, my!

"You could fill the Colosseum with them, couldn't you, Glass-Eye? I've been spoilt, everywhere," continued Lily, "and I'm known, everywhere! Even in Paris, to-day, there were a lot of ladies and gentlemen under an arcade and you heard nothing but 'Miss Lily, Miss Lily,' didn't you, Glass-Eye?"

"Yes, Miss Lily."

But these social successes did not make Lily forget her business affairs. Kellermann's new music-hall worried her: if she could only play there, only snatch it from the New Trickers! For they would certainly try to get there; and the architect, of course, knew. . . .

But Lily was interrupted by the call-boy: time for her to go down to the stage. . . . A hurricane came up from

the orchestra, muffled, with beats of the big drum, like distant cannon. The curtain would go up soon ; it was the time when Lily stretched her legs, before giving her performance, and took a breath of air in the painted forest. A click of the padlock and :

“ Come along, Glass-Eye, the bike ! ”

Lily, in spite of her brilliant successes in England, was dead tired of tipping the boys ; it ran away with all her money. As she allowed herself the luxury of a maid, by Golliwog, she might as well make use of her ; she wasn't going to feed her to do nothing ! And poor Glass-Eye attended to the bike, at the risk of putting out her other eye. Every day, the struggle between Glass-Eye and the bike formed the joy and delight of the passage. There were incredible swervings, scratchings of the wall, barkings of Glass-Eye's shins. Lily followed behind, bursting with laughter, warning Glass-Eye to take care or she would put the bike out of gear by knocking it about with her legs :

“ Oh, where's my belt ? ” she cried, patting the back of her hand.

The artistes, attracted by the noise, half-opened the doors ; laughing eyes gleamed at the peep-holes ; voices cried :

“ Go it ! Never say die ! ”

Glass-Eye perspired like anything, pursed her eyebrows above her fat, red cheeks, growled, in her Whitechapel slang :

“ Kim up, you lousy moke ! 'Igher up, Jerusalem, you pig-headed bag of tricks ! ”

Lily lost patience, snatched the machine from her, ran it down the stairs, pushed the door of the “ meat-tray ” and found herself behind the scenes, the drops rising and falling, the nightly spectacle since she had been “ that high,” the land of the unreal lights. . . . And the sudden glare from the reflectors set clusters of shoulders flaring with a silvery glow, brought up out of the shade the pale flesh of the dancing-girls, heaped up behind the pillars.

They flocked from every side, right and left—"Hi, there! Meat, meat!"—under the rush of the stage hands shifting the wings. There were fleecy foams of fair wigs, smiles from kiss-me-quick lips, blinkings of made-up eyelids, a swarm of arms, thighs and necks, preparatory to a ballet, *Heures d'amour*, in which Poland, the Parisienne, triumphed with her costumes: *Déshabillé galant*, *Dessous diaphanes*, *Le Tub*, *Volupté*, *Dodo*, eight pantomimic scenes in a sumptuous setting, with girls to impersonate the Hours, from pale-pink flirtation to scarlet desire.

Lily watched this familiar sight with a wandering eye; and suddenly she turned pale: what was that? Who was that? In the midst of it all, smiling to her from a distance, as though laughing at her, stood Trampy! My!

"Here, hold my bike, Glass-Eye!"

It was close on her turn, but, before going on, she had a word to say to the stage-manager and, walking up to him:

"Do you see that josser looking at me?" said Lily, pointing to Trampy. "If he stays here, I . . . to begin with, I shan't go on. I won't be humbugged by any one!"

"Who is it?"

"My husband!"

"All right, darling," said the stage-manager. And, suddenly, between the scene which was being hoisted up and the other let down on the silent, empty stage, "Hi! You there! Get out!"

Trampy could not believe that the words were meant for him. He waited until the order had been twice repeated. He, an artiste, before those girls! He made a gesture as though to ask:

"Do you mean me?"

"Yes, you! No jossers here," said the stage-manager. "Sling your hook!"



"Gee!" thought Lily, when he had gone. "This time you've been paid back in your own coin! So you kicked me out at the Horse Shoe, did you? It's my turn now, you damned tramp!"

She exulted with delight, as she went through her performance. It was her first revenge! The other's turn would come next.

"I don't forgive and I don't forget," she muttered to herself. "Every dog has his day."

Oh, how happy she was! She was magnificent on the stage, under the flashing lights, and the dull sounds in the orchestra were to her as the throbbing of a riotous heart.

"Well, Trampy, you got soaked to-night, to-night," thought Lily, as she might have said, "One, two!" to mark her times. "To-night, to-night. And, if you don't like it—one, two—you've only got to lump it! Divorce was made for men and women, not for dogs!"

Lily was triumphant, laughed, winked her eye, as she rode past, at the stage-manager, who threw her a kiss and grinned. Immediately after her turn, she ran to her dressing-room, poured water on her steaming skin, while the make-up trickled in pink streaks down her face, and devoted an hour to the dainty care of her person, like a cat licking itself. And then Lily, without paint or powder—awfully ugly, not in the least pretty off the stage, as she said, smiling in her muslin tie with the gold spots—Lily went out by the front, to avoid the pros' corridor.

The moment she was in the lobby, she assumed the air of a lady accompanied by her maid. She cast an indifferent eye at the string of carriages, like one who changes her mind and prefers to walk, a smile to the gentlemen at the *contrôle*, a nod to the Roofers going out, two by two always, a dark one and a fair one. Lily stopped for a second, to look round; then:

"Let's go home, Glass-Eye!"

....

She took a few steps along the street, but a jolly voice behind her cried :

"Gee, what a spanking walk !"

She turned round : it was Trampy again !

"Ah, this time," thought Lily, "I shall have witnesses !"

She expected blows. She would have given anything to be struck : her divorce, at last, would be hastened on ! Cruelty, public insults ! But no :

"How's my dear little wife ?" asked Trampy, with outstretched hand.

Lily was so greatly surprised that it took her some seconds to recover her presence of mind ; and then, without turning her head :

"Come away, Glass-Eye," she said. "There are drunkards about !"

"Don't let us quarrel, wifey. Aren't you my dear little wifey ? Well, then. . . ."

And Trampy took her by the arm.

"Let me go, or I'll break your jaw," muttered Lily, under her breath.

Trampy seemed in a jovial mood, with his cigar in his mouth, his cheeks flushed with insolence, his eyes moist with libations :

"Let's make peace," said Trampy. "Peace in the home : that's my motto !"

"Divorce !" cried Lily.

"Peace in the home for me !" rejoined Trampy, who grew the more radiant as Lily grew more and more incensed. "Let me tell you," he continued, puffing luxuriously at his cigar, "that divorce—why, how can you think of it ?—means a public scandal, my name dragged in the mud. . . ."

"You footy rotter !" roared Lily.

"Dragged in the mud ; and my dear little wife left to her own resources, marrying again, as she feels inclined, marrying some one unworthy of her, perhaps. I won't

have it! I'm responsible for you! I'm your natural protector! You're not Miss Lily, you're Mrs. Trampy. You've been in the wrong, certainly; you had me turned off the stage, me, your husband; but I forgive you."

"And I . . . take that!" Lily broke in, spitting in his face. "That's how *I* forgive *you*: take that! And that!"

Trampy revelled with delight:

"You *are* my dear little wifey, aren't you? And you'll remain so . . . and you'll never belong to any one else, do you hear? I am a faithful husband. You're trying for a divorce, I know, but you won't get it. The wrong is on your side; and I'm not going to law; and you're Mrs. Trampy and Mrs. Trampy you'll remain! Will you come and have a drink, Mrs. Trampy?" lighting a fresh cigar. "You won't? Very well. Good night, wifey!"

And Trampy, turning his back to her, disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

#### IV

LILY went home and straight to bed, without even waiting for supper, so great was her hurry to forget. It seemed to her that things had happened, things without end ; that this day had been as long as a year. She simply could not understand Trampy. She could have imagined anything, except that ! She racked her brain to conjecture how, why ; and sleep quieted her till the next morning ; and she woke up with teeth clenched and eyebrows set and . . . why ? Why ? And again why ? Did he still want to keep her ? Surely he could not want to keep her, after realizing in a hundred different ways that she did not love him, that she loathed him, that she had married him only to escape her whippings and that she had but one idea in her head : to divorce him !

Now—only, Lily could not know this—it was because of that very reason that Trampy clung to her, like a faithful husband : Jimmy, Jimmy was his bugbear. He believed Jimmy to be in love with his wife. Once Lily was divorced, Jimmy could have married her ; and Trampy would see him further first ! The greater Jimmy became, the more jealous Trampy grew. He knew the steps Lily had taken to obtain a divorce, the witnesses she had tried to secure. She was very keen on a divorce, was she ? All the more reason for not gratifying her ; and she wasn't going to get it. The witnesses, Trampy had just heard, declined to give evidence. They had seen nothing, heard nothing. A bike at her head ? Maybe. They didn't know. A bit of a fuss between artistes, such as you see every day,

and none of their damned business. Outside that, Lily had nothing to go upon; on the contrary. She had abandoned the conjugal home; all the wrong, apparently, was on her side. He, Trampy, alone was entitled to file a petition; but that never! He considered that Jimmy and Lily had trifled with him sufficiently. He could not swallow the idea that they were only waiting for the divorce to get married; the idea that Lily would be Mrs. Jimmy, of her own free choice, after marrying him, Trampy, to escape her whippings: no, he couldn't swallow that! Now it rested entirely with him to prevent that marriage. He had but to keep his dear little wife for himself. In that case, Jimmy, if he wanted her, would be obliged to do without her or else to "live with her" and set a bad example, lavish bestower of good advice that he was, the dirty hypocrite, preaching morality to others! That was what Trampy had determined to do. As for Lily, Trampy was virtually incapable of either hatred or love and didn't care one way or the other. He was always sure to want for nothing, so long as there were girls on the boards and whisky in the bars.

There was another reason still that urged him to let matters rest, without going further: to embark on a divorce-case, to have his name in the papers and his story hawked round the four quarters of the globe—"Trampy, you know. You knew Trampy, didn't you? The husband of Lily?" and so on—was what he didn't want at any price, for a reason known to himself. He had made enquiries, quite privately, at the beginning, when he thought of petitioning for a divorce; and what he had learnt had made him prudent: his marriage in America was valid beyond a doubt. He was well and duly married, whether he liked it or not. By the common law, two wives meant bigamy; and bigamy meant prison, which was the last thing he wanted, as he himself said. But, so long as there

was no scandal, he ran no great risk. He had lived on tenter-hooks at first, in Germany. Chance might have brought him face to face with Ave Maria, on the stage of a music-hall. This danger was not to be feared now, so far as he knew. Ave Maria and her brother were no longer fit stars for Europe, nor for North America. Martello was too well known to the agencies ; his brutality had produced too many complaints, too many denunciations to the police ; it discredited any theatre employing him. He might have come to Europe—who knew ?—to try to get hold of the Bambinis, now that the old man had not much longer to live. But that was not very likely, either. An artiste, encountered by accident, had seen the pair at Iquique, in a wretched circus that was doing the coast of Chili. He gave Trampy details : poor Ave Maria had grown very ugly ; a body all skin and bone and nerves ; no hips, no chest ; nothing of the woman about her ; in the last stages of consumption ; and finished, as an artiste, done for ; no spring left in her overworked thighs, no suppleness in her loins : even her brother, that brute, could get nothing out of her now. And Trampy, who knew Chili, followed them, in his mind, on their tour along the coast, from Iquique to Copiapo, to Valdivia : a trying climate, biting winds which would kill her on the spot, unless she went and perished in the fever-stricken plains of the Argentine. . . . When people had fallen so low as that, they did not rise again : there was nothing to fear from that side. But her presence was not necessary ; the danger still existed. There were documents, in black and white. Their names were bracketed on a register somewhere or other : he knew where. It was better, therefore, in every way, not to call attention to himself. Meanwhile, he was playing a nice trick on Lily and her Jimmy. And Lily was Mrs. Trampy and Mrs. Trampy she would remain ; and that was all about it.

But it was no use for Lily to give herself a headache trying to make out why and how. She did not guess Trampy's secret thoughts, any more than he suspected the actual nature of her relations with Jimmy. For her, too, one thing was certain : Mrs. Trampy she was and Mrs. Trampy she would remain. She would never be free ; she would always be chained to that tramp-cyclist. And, if a match should happen to turn up for her among her admirers, the architect, for instance—you can never tell : plenty of others had already proposed for her hand, in England—she would be obliged to refuse. And, if some gentleman were to pay her his addresses, treat her like a lady, take her to choose a hat or a silk petticoat in a smart shop, there was somebody who would have the right to say to her, as she passed :

“ How's my little wife getting on ? ”

Oh, those two Jim Crows round her, spoiling her future ! Jimmy and Trampy ! They would end by being the death of her. Oh, if she had had Thea's arm, what a blow in the jaw for one or both of them ! And Lily, when she thought of it, wore the face which was hers on her bad days, teeth clenched, stubborn forehead. Glass-Eye shook in her boots when she saw it, for sometimes Lily vented her anger upon the poor girl with a smack, considering herself quits if she begged pardon after.

“ If it's one of those footy rotters,” growled Lily, hearing a knock at the door, “ smash a bottle over his head ! ”

But it was simply her letters, sent on from the theatre. Nothing of importance this morning ; prospectuses, mostly : a wig-maker, special theatrical department ; a manufacturer of travelling-hampers, for South Africa, Australia. . . .

“ No use for them,” thought Lily, with a sigh.

And, on opening *The Era*, she received that discour-

aging sensation : always so many names and so many tricks and all " the best " ; new ideas and troupes, troupes, troupes ; another new troupe of fat freaks, a very flood of them ; and Roofers, Roofers : " Greater-Greater England Girls," words and music guaranteed, with scarlet legs and muslin skirts, complete ; page upon page of pink tights ; and national troupes and colonial troupes ; and one had to earn a livelihood and shine among all that ! Lily was half crushed ; and everybody she knew was triumphing : the Pawnees, one hundred and thirty music-halls, the whole of the Eastern and Western Trusts, the great two-years' tour ! The Three Graces also were continuing their victories. Lily, who felt herself the equal of any of them, held her breath as she read the news : Laurence had won her terrible bet that she would ride straight across Manchester and Salford on her bike, hands tied together, feet fastened to the pedals. At the Art Institute in Chicago, Marjutti had given a lecture on the art of contortion :

" Some jossor of a journalist wrote it for her ! " thought Lily.

And *The Performer Annual* had sent Marjutti its set of questions to answer, she had been published in print ! And Lily was still waiting ! And Tom ? Tom was in England now, in the De Frece Circuit ; had had a triumph at the Portsmouth Hippodrome, as " Topsy Turvy Tommy," dancing a sailor's hornpipe on his hands. All, all were successful, including others even who were not so good as she was : one who obtained engagements because she had a nigger in her show ; another because of a monkey.

" And I've done nothing yet ! " grumbled Lily.

Oh, to be talked about in her turn, to achieve something, to become " our Lily ! "

" It's twelve o'clock and I'm still in bed ! " she cried. " I ought to be practising ! "

It was just a flash of pride, mixed with remorse. She knew it well enough : often and often, she had reproached



herself for her idleness, for her habit of sleeping till the middle of the day, of taking her meals before the performance; but she would make up for it to-morrow. It was the usual refrain of stars who have become detached from their troupes, far removed from regimental discipline, so to speak : without a Pa, without a boss, you can do nothing. You must have some one to force you.

" A month on the three-years'-book before to-night ! " prayed Lily, touching her lucky charm.

And she studied the omens with an expert air, gave an ear to passing sounds, tried to catch their meaning, for she had visits to pay, letters to write, business, damn it !

That was what Pa used to say before her. And it was not so easy to turn a letter prettily : that was Trampy's forte. She knew something about it. Lily, in her night-dress, with her elbows on the table, bit her pen, reflected, in a mental effort that gave her a headache. And that note-paper wasn't nice, either, without a heading ; true, it only rested with herself ; every day she was approached with offers of artistic photographs, even of tricks which she did not do : standing with one foot on the saddle, the other in the air and her arms stretched out before her, like a flying genius ; or as Cupid, with his dart in his hand : impossible things which neither the Pawnees nor Laurence would have dared to attempt ! But it would look well, with her name in red letters : " Miss Lily," or " La Belle Lily." Or else a photo showing her strolling in a great park, with a palace in the background, taken from nature ; followed by her maid, or by a footman, hired by the hour, for the occasion.

" I think I shall select the governess," said Lily to herself, " because of my biography ; it will be nicer, truer. Or I might be taken riding on the back-wheel, like a lady just leaving the house and doing that to amuse herself ! "

Lily, still undecided, took up the pen again : one foot

on the saddle ; six pairs of tights ; three dresses ; the theatres at which she had appeared. . . .

What a pack of jossers ! She couldn't forgive the agents for her present want of success. She was exasperated. She felt inclined to go and see the managers themselves, those who had made love to her on the stage, and to send in her card to them—"Miss Lily"—just to teach those jossers of agents ! Her independent ways had already made enemies for her : she knew that ; but how could she help being angry ? The tricks they played you, down to making you miss a marriage, as had happened in London, the other day, to the Three Graces, to one of them, who had been courted, during Mr. Fuchs' absence, by the boy-violinist. Their agent had launched into slanders and even insults to prevent the marriage, which would have split up the troupe and broken the contract. . . .

"What a pack of nigger-drivers !" thought Lily. "As long as they get their ten per cent., the rest can go hang, for all they care !"

There was no doubt that Lily had got out of bed on the wrong side, at the thought of having to climb all those staircases again and to dance attendance with the rotten lot in the waiting-rooms. But, by Jove, she could have boxed the ears of the first agent she visited that afternoon ! He had the impudence to offer her a magnificent engagement in the Indian show at Earl's Court, she to stain her skin brown, dye her hair black, with rings in her nose, on her wrists, on her ankles ; the nautch-girl on the bicycle ; six times a day, in the open air, to the sound of tomtoms ; playing the negress, in short ! She could not help laughing, in spite of her anger. But she became quite intractable and snubbed another agent who suggested a one day's billet in a tiny music-hall at a ridiculous price :

"I don't give my performance under five pounds, or on a stage less than thirty feet !" cried Lily.

At last, fortune seemed to turn ; she settled for Spain and Portugal, and, that same evening, at the Bijou Theatre, she was offered another engagement, for three months hence. This contract would procure her others, after her spell of ill-luck. Lily at once took fresh courage :

“ Oh, if I had the Astrarium ! ” she thought.

Everywhere, at the theatre, at the agents', people were talking of the new music-hall. It even became a current joke. They said, “ So-and-So's performing at the Astrarium,” as though to say, “ He is not performing ! He's living in a castle in the air ! ” Every one was talking of the great music-hall which was to open in a few months and which was not to be seen building anywhere. Some said that it was serious ; they quoted engagements : Tom ; the Three Graces ; the impersonator ; nothing but turns quite unknown to Paris ; novelties, nothing but novelties : Marjutti ; Laurence, perhaps ; or the New Trickers. Lily shivered when she heard that ! . . . She opened wide eyes, like Alice in Wonderland : oh, to appear there ! But she had performed in Paris. Then she would change her name ; bike mixed with dancing ; and her whole trick done backwards, as Pa had once advised Trampy to do in Mexico ! Oh, if she could have that ! Lily Godiva, undressed on the bike ! She'd show them that she was a lady, not a performing dog ! The Astrarium, that was certain, would open in Paris in a few months. Kellermann had said so. There was no doubt about it. Lily felt herself carried away with ambition. Oh, to open there ! Oh, if it were true ! God grant that it might come true ! Oh if Daisy, their star, could only break a leg !

The few days which Lily was still to spend in Paris, before leaving for Spain, she employed in obtaining further information. She learnt the most exact particulars. Incredible though it seemed, the Astrarium

was to open quite shortly! The blue-chins discussed the thing, amid clouds of tobacco smoke, in the bars, after the show. To allude to it now was not like talking of castles in the air; on the contrary. To tease a pal, one said:

"You're opening at the Astrarium, aren't you? I *don't* think!"

Which was another way of saying:

"The Astrarium's no place for you! They're taking nothing but bill-toppers there!"

The new music-hall, even before it came into existence, was beginning to spread, like the story of the whippings; it would be talked about, all round the world, as something stunning, a more complete show than the Sydney Tivoli or the New York Hippodrome. Kellermann was credited with designs for a palace in onyx and marble. He had bought or was going to buy a theatre with the object of transforming it; names and prices were given. Everybody was interested in it. Just now, especially, when the bioscopes and the gramophones and the singers were taking the bread out of the "artistes'" mouths, it meant twenty turns more who would draw princely salaries there; and, every month, that galaxy of stars, which Kellermann would send shooting to Paris, was to disperse towards Brussels, Antwerp, Marseilles, Hamburg: the European Trust, the Bill and Boom Tour of the continent, managed by Kellermann, the great English manager.

To open at the Astrarium meant having work insured and your three-years'-book filled for ever so long ahead; meant appearing in public, later, wearing the medal which they were going to distribute in memory of the opening. Gee, Lily had a pain in her side at the thought of it! The Three Graces, it was said, were on the programme. Lily would have consulted them—there was no jealousy about the Graces—but they were not yet in Paris.

Oh, Lily was longing and dying to be settled ! Who was Kellermann's agent ? If she had to go to London to see him, she would go. Why, damn it, she would go to Heaven itself to get the Astrarium ! Anything, anything to open there !

That dream of greatness made her endure her present vexations : Mrs. Trampy . . . Mrs. Trampy . . . she was addressed as Mrs. Trampy everywhere. Trampy must be telling the story, taking his revenge for the whippings, making little of her in his turn. One night even, the day before her departure for Spain, when the architect was to wait for her at the door of the theatre, Lily, who had dressed herself in her best, once more had the humiliation of being accosted by Trampy in front of everybody :

“ Hullo, wifey ! How are you, darling ? All right ? ”

Lily bristled with rage as she left Paris. Even when she was far away, she still felt that she was dragging a chain which lengthened out endlessly without breaking. Never, oh, nothing could ever get her out of that ! Yes, a brilliant triumph. Then, at least, she could crush him from the height of her success, that footy rotter with his red-hot stove ! Oh, what a grudge she bore him ! Jimmy was different : that was a wound of her own and nobody would ever know ; but Trampy, who laughed at her everywhere and called himself her husband ! He would make her lose all her friends. To say nothing of the fact that those tales perhaps counted for much in her failure : they were repeated from mouth to mouth. Oh, her profession disgusted her at times ! And to think that she, an English girl, was going to earn her bread among the Dagoes, instead of starrng in England !

Her wandering life continued ; her journeys from town to town, in the Spanish provinces, her arrival in the chill of the morning, her anxiety about her salary, the hustle and

bustle of departure and—trot, trot, trot!—lugged about in the railway-carriage, like a performing dog in his box.

And what theatres! It was worse than Germany or even Paris. In England, on the Kellermann Tour or the Bill and Boom, they had nice dressing-rooms, with a carpet, water hot and cold, quick attendance, stairs swept every day. Here, old plaster and those idiots who looked as if they understood nothing—it took three of them to shift a scene—Dagoes who asked her straight out, in pigeon-English, if she was alone:

“No man viz you?”

It touched her on the raw. Lily lost all her cheerfulness: to begin with, that engagement was not a particularly brilliant one; it was not at all calculated to prompt her to do better, to introduce novelties into her turn. Besides, on stages not yet overrun with Roofers or fat freaks, an artiste performing by herself made an impression. Her work sufficed; sometimes she topped the bill:

“Theatres are the same everywhere; artistes the same everywhere, from New York to Bilbao. Topping the bill in one means topping the bill in the others . . . doesn’t it, Glass-Eye?”

But she knew quite well that it didn’t; and, besides, that satisfaction of her vanity put no money in her pocket. The amount she owed, my! She thought of the past, of what she had earned for “them” since Mexico. If she had only had half of it, a quarter, a quarter of a quarter, damn it!

Meantime, she had to make herself respected. In those countries, where people used gestures when they spoke to you, a lady could not be too careful. Why, the men treated an English girl just as they treated their own women! She could have flung her bike at their heads! And they kept it up all night, as in Russia, all except the jewels. You had to stay till morning and were expected to accept invitations for supper, so as to keep the customer

there and push business ! A little more and she would have had to sleep there ! She had threatened to tear up her contract, to complain to the consul. And what annoyed her also was being in the same dressing-room with singers who undressed without shame, while receiving their friends, and made eyes at Lily worse than the impersonator.

And she had to have her food at the theatre : no dessert, nothing but a biscuit or an apple ; if she asked for a pear, it caused a terrible to-do. Rather than stand that, Lily went to the hotel, which put her to double expense, for the board at the theatre was compulsory. She had to pay in any case ; so that she went away without a farthing, thinking herself very lucky if the manager did not try to kiss her in his office. Oh, the things she saw, the things she rubbed shoulders with : the vice, the promiscuity ; the rushes of girls in the passages before the onslaughts of footy rotters ; direct propositions, with eyes looking straight into eyes ; brief wooings on the stairs, behind the properties, between people just about to take the train, one east, the other west, and in a hurry to have done with it : a silent embrace in the dressing-room, a hinnying kiss and *au revoir*, ta-ta !

And the conversations between the stage-girls, who were always surrounded by legends of the white slave-trade ; stories of disappearances, of " engagements for Caracas " and finding one's self over there without resources, stranded in a bad house : like that poor girl, a Roofer, who had received a letter and some sweets in her slipper, which she had sent flying into the audience with a high kick—Lily remembered—well, she had disappeared in South America, somewhere ; one or two despairing letters and then silence. And that other one, at Alexandria, who had called out for help, behind her green blinds ; and ever and ever so many others, whom she had known slightly. Lily shivered : b-r-r-r-r-r !

She was sick to death of it. She had had enough of it, was fed up with it. She aspired to better things. Lily had hoped that her engagement in Spain would have marked the end of her bad luck ; but no, nothing offered. She was sour, bitter, fierce ; a wild bull, a stallion, as Ma used to say. And she became especially terrible now, when her energy was spent in neither work nor love, so much so that there was a cross against her name in the agents' books.

Oh, she had often felt inclined to send them all to the devil : the made-up eyes, the kiss-me-quick lips, the tow wigs, the low jokes, the monkey-claws ! There were some who had merit, no doubt, like that boy who was all over scratches, from head to foot, through training cats ; but the rest, almost all of them, were a pack of good-for-nothings who copied their betters : amateurs, jossers all ; and they had more work than she, who had taken such pains and who had made a fortune for her Pa. Oh, if that wasn't enough to make her chuck everything and see life, in her turn ! She had only to choose. . . .

These reflections came to her more particularly when she returned to Paris, after Brussels and Copenhagen, and was again performing at the Bijou Theatre, where she had already appeared.

"To make all that money," thought Lily, when she saw Poland again, "and never to have been through the mill!"

She admired Poland for that, envied her good manners, her grace, the way she slipped on her dressing-wrap in the living picture, *The Bath*. She turned green with jealousy at the sight of Poland's motor-car, her thousand-pound ear-rings, her sable furs. It was not that Lily lacked admirers or sympathizers. She even had a little triumph at the Bijou Theatre, one day when she passed round the hat for old Martello, who was ill in bed and penniless.



Lily topped the bill in her own fashion, by putting her name at the head of the list, and the collection was a success, everybody contributed, including the architect, who was still prowling round her, in the passages, on the stage, everywhere. Lily was decidedly courted: the rich bookmaker who ran the theatre as his private harem, he, too, patted her cheek in a funny way, complimented her on her firm, round hips before the group of dancing-girls packed like poultry in the shadow of the pillars. Gee, it only rested with herself to have as much of that as Poland! And everything reeked with love, amid the thunder of the drums and the clash of the cymbals, while the sudden flashes of the reflectors, moonlight-blue on the one side, bright-red on the other, lit up all around her the herd of the languid Hours. But her heart swelled and puffed with pride. No, no, not that! She would succeed by her talent, damn it, not by getting round men! She, an English girl; she, Pa's daughter; she, who had gone through the mill, to sell herself like cat's meat! Never! And her Ma should beg her pardon on her knees, on her knees, damn it! The thought infuriated her.

She was quite sincere with herself. It was all her fault. She ought to have worked and practised, practised every day, improved and improved her turn; but she would do so now, to-morrow. It was her last chance. She had hardly any money left; her three-years'-book was virgin once again, unsoiled by contracts; but she had a stage to practise on and she was going to practise to-morrow, even if she had to pay somebody to run after her, with the belt, if need be! Lily had nothing but that in her head now: to get out of her present life, to get out of the mud, to reach the summit at a bound. Was it possible? She consulted the Zanzigs; she spent a fortune in penny-in-the-slot machines to learn the future, but always received the same reply:

"You will marry the man who loves you. You will be very happy."

She smiled with pity when she read that nonsense ; to prophesy her marriage : how silly ! She was only too much married ! That was not what she wanted to know ; but the Astrarium, the Astrarium ! Would she be there or would she not ? The New Trickers were plotting to get there, with a turn which she had given them, goose that she was ; and Cousin Daisy, that farthing dip, would triumph and not she, a star, a real one ! Lily was rather in the position of Pa, when he arrived in London from New York . . . with this difference, that Pa had money and Lily had none. But there was the same display of energy, once her pride was roused. Lily also had run round Paris like a mad thing : not to the agents—with them it was : "Lily ? Lily Clifton ? Nothing your way to-day !"—but to her friends and acquaintances, to find out about the Astrarium. Lily grew crazy at the idea that she might perform there, be there at the opening, ride over all of them, treat the New Trickers like so many fat freaks !

"Oh, God, if it were true !" she cried, with her hand on her lucky charm. "God above, grant that it may come true !"

She was at the end of her tether. Nothing short of the Astrarium could set her on her legs again. She had no choice ; it was either that or an absolute come-down : the nautch-girl on the bike, at Earl's Court, or else nights of dissipation, champagne and diamonds, like Poland ; and Lily, like her Pa in the old days, clenched her little fists and gnawed her lip, as she went off to the Three Graces, who had their engagement and who would give her some hints.

Lily knew their hotel by reputation. Nothing but pros ; a rallying-point of troupes, an hotel where nobody's skin was free from bruises and where, from morning until night, you heard the clatter of the clog-dancers' heels. It

reeked of potatoes, of sleepers three in a bed ; chests, strange-shaped packing-cases, ticketed with distant labels, made the yard look like the stage-entrance of a music-hall. Lily did not care for that sort of place : no matter ; besides, the Bambinis were there and their mad rushes, their yells of mirth filled the gloomy house with gaiety. And Lily did not mind walking in with her gold-tasselled hat on. All those heads at the windows : it was just like a fine lady visiting the poor. And yet she was not proud now. Formerly, she would have laughed on learning the kind of life led by the Three Graces, those three girls who remained good lest they should break up the troupe and annoy Nunkie, and who were said to spend their spare time in sewing and cooking and doing Sandow exercises and measuring one another round the biceps and the chest : simple joys, the only true ones.

"They may be right, after all," thought Lily, who envied them from the bottom of her heart for having the Astrarium. "If I had only practised too ! Practising is certainly better than giving so much thought to one's dresses or sending those puff photos to the agents !"

A surprise awaited Lily when she entered the hotel ; pros were talking with a mysterious air. There was muttering in the corners, a piece of news was going round : the Bijou Theatre had closed, that very day ; the treasury was empty, bankrupt ; everything sealed up ; just on the eve of pay-day too !

"My ! Is it possible ?" thought Lily, distracted, and forgetting the Astrarium and the Three Graces. "And what am I to do for food to-morrow ? Come, quick, Glass-Eye !" she whispered, catching her a thump in the ribs. "To the theatre, quick !"

For Lily knew by experience that it was a good thing to be first. Her Pa had saved his salary once, in a similar case, at Perth, in Australia ; but one must arrive in time.

## V

THERE was a crowd in front of the Bijou when she arrived. They were commenting on a notice posted on the door :  
“ *Fermé.* ”

What could that mean ? Lily had not provided for this in her vocabulary of the French language ; but the theatre was closed until new arrangements could be made. It meant complete ruin, enforced idleness. . . .

“ The rotten lot ! ” growled Lily. “ Money, damn it, money ! Pay up, you pack of thieves ! ”

But she soon recovered herself, when she saw that there was nothing to be done. She had been through worse than that, when the iron curtain all but smashed her to a jelly, at Milwaukee, and when she tumbled into the orchestra at Glasgow ! Notwithstanding the anguish that wrung her inside and heralded the coming hunger, Lily put a good face on the matter before all those people, like a lady who is above that sort of thing : a disappointment, that was all.

“ But how will the small artistes manage ? ” she seemed to say. “ The families with babies ? ”

Lily declared that it was very sad, called Glass-Eye to witness, as usual ; but poor Glass-Eye remained dumb, reflected that she would never, never be paid, if this went on. Lily owed her eighteen months’ wages now ! True, she got enough to eat, or nearly ; she travelled with Lily ; she wore her old hats. . . .

Meanwhile, the door opened ; the artistes were allowed

to take away the implements of their work, before the final closing. The move began : they fetched out basket trunks, hoisted packing-cases on to cabs. It was a heart-rending sight, all those things, made for the glitter of the footlights, now displayed in the street. And everybody made such haste as he could, under the eyes of the inquisitive passers-by, for fear of a general execution, with every door sealed up and days to wait before one could recover one's property. Fellow-artistes from other theatres came to look on. Some were indignant that the Artists' Federation could not take up the matter and hurl the experience of its lawyers at the heads of the proprietor or syndicate responsible, to say nothing of the moral weight of its five thousand members, who had already made the English music-halls come to terms by means of a wholesale strike. Others observed that it was a private theatre, one of those theatres run, for the fun of it, by some prosperous gambler or lucky bookmaker ; a sort of harem theatre, with almost empty houses, but with swells on the stage, among the swarm of half-naked women ; and no one responsible, the old boy ruined, the treasury empty, bankruptcy ; couldn't be helped ; take in your belt a hole, that's all !

" What do you think of this, eh, Lily ? " asked a voice. " Only yesterday we were sending round the hat for others ! "

Lily still had the list ; and the money was locked up in one of the dressing-rooms. Then it passed from mouth to mouth, like a watchword : they would give back the collection ; but not in the street, not before everybody, for the honour of the profession. Lily, quite excited, entered the passage and there, in the dim light, assisted by two one-legged artistes, who called out the amounts and ticked off the names, she handed back the collection of the previous day. Some received their share with an air of furious

determination ; others looked shy and blushed ; others, again, refused, Lily among them ; and it was decided to go to the " Pros' Corner," or artistes' bar, near the stage-entrance, to drink up what remained : the ups and downs of life, damn it ! Your turn to-day, mine to-morrow ; jolly lucky not to break a leg, after all ! And their gaiety returned, amid the smoke and the glasses, through a need of reaction ; and, after the first drink or two, came jokes, after-dinner stories, impromptus which had travelled ten times round the world and brought tears of laughter to the eyes of the audiences in thousands of music-halls, not to speak of the second-class cabins of every ship of every line and the smoking-carriages of every train, from the G.I.P.R. of Bombay to the S.F. of Buenos Ayres.

" Owen Moore went West one day,  
Owing more than he could pay.  
Owen Moore came back to-day—  
Owing more ! "

And they joined in the chorus and they sang, " We all came into this world with nothing ! " and the one-legged artistes beat time with their crutches, my ! The pink Hour and the scarlet Hour, who were there, got a stitch in their side. Lily, with her head flung back, full-throated, laughed nervously. Besides, as she said, artistes did as they pleased and didn't care a hang for anybody. All made plans for the morrow, all had been through that sort of thing before and much worse, too : six storeys cleared at a bound, to escape from a theatre in flames ! Falls of seventy feet on one's head ! And wrecks ! And waves miles high ! Already they began to talk of going away, of travelling ; traced the route with their finger on the table : Cape Town, Australia, the States. To listen to them, those everlasting wanderers seemed to have pretty nearly the whole world under their hands. They spoke of taking a rest at their permanent addresses : good old London ;

good old Manchester ; there was nothing like good old England, after all, eh ? They'd had enough of the Dago countries !

But enthusiasm broke out when the great news arrived, brought by some one straight from the agencies : Kellermann—"Guess, boys !"—Kellermann had bought the Bijou Theatre ! It was all signed and sealed. He was carrying out his programme and he wanted to open at once. For three months, it appeared, there had been a silent struggle between him and the unlucky bookmaker, who did not want to sell ; and Kellermann had got it almost for nothing : he had practically won it, yesterday, at the races, with Dare Devil, his wonderful horse. Dare Devil had beaten Cataplasm, his rival's colt, and the smash had followed at once : the Bijou closed ; a forced sale ; Kellermann had bagged it ; and that was one, with more to come !

The artistes were carried away by this daring stroke. Kellermann, a son of a gun, who could put them all in his pocket ! The one-legged artistes fought a mock duel between France and England, the victor to marry Lily : what did they think of that ? Hurrah !

"Say, boys, what's the quickest way of dropping money ? "

"Fast women ! "

"No, slow horses ! "

Yes, it was grand. They drank to everybody's health. They drank to Kellermann, they drank to the Astrarium. They counted the money on the bar-counter ; the amount of the collection had been greatly exceeded and somebody suggested that it was a nice thing, upon my word, yes, a very nice thing, what they were doing : having a good time, while the Bambinis, perhaps, were going to bed without any supper ! The whiskies-and-sodas had warmed their hearts : my turn to-day, yours to-morrow, damn it !

It might happen to any of them, to hop the twig and leave Bambinis behind him.

"Lily, the hat!"

And Lily handed round the hat again and collected more than on the day before, even among those who had had their money back.

"Take that to the Bambinis. We've been behaving like Dagos, damn it! Artistes ought to act as such!"

"'K you! 'K you!"

And Lily Clifton walked off, very proudly, with her maid, to hand the money to Nunkie, who was acting as treasurer.

"And, meantime, one's got to live," said Lily to herself, when she was outside.

After the spurious gaiety of the moment, she seemed to be returning to her distress, with no work, no money, the Bijou closed, Kellermann taking possession of the theatre. . . . She revolved all this in her head, without succeeding in connecting the whole together: rags of ideas hung in her brain, like the strips of scenery at the back of the stage. She had not even the courage to go and take her bike . . . To-morrow . . . to-morrow. . . . The Hours, the pink one and the scarlet one, came out of the bar also and resigned themselves gaily. Their salary mattered so little. As they explained to Lily, you're always well paid, when you have rich friends; and, if you haven't, all you need do is to look out for them:

"Like Poland, what! A fat lot she cares that the old boy's ruined! All that she'll do is to find another, change her owner!"

Lily had knocked up against everything, seen everything, heard everything, in her adventurous life; but this way of getting out of a difficulty always made her blush to the eyes. No, a triumph at the Astrarium: that was the only solution for her, Lily Clifton! She was eager also to hand the money to Nunkie. The Bambinis' money was



a different matter from Jimmy's: they were hungry children. Nunkie must be at the theatre now, close by, with his Three Graces, and they were going to perform at the Astrarium. So it was not essential that one should never have appeared in Paris! That meant a chance for her!

"Come along, Glass-Eye!"

They now passed into the noisy quarters. The Olympia opened its furnace of light before them. The Three Graces stood displayed in life-size on posters, with others beside them, names which Lily knew vaguely, as she knew them all from seeing them somewhere, as she knew the stage-entrance of the Olympia, by instinct, in the dark street, at the side: the mouth by which the monster nightly swallowed and rejected its fill of meat. A courtyard . . . three steps up . . . turn to the right . . . Lily was at home again, amid rainbow lights.

"Hullo, Lily!"

It was Nunkie greeting her on the stage, while his dear girls were dressing in their room. He took the money for the Bambinis, congratulated Lily on the result of her collection, thanked her.

"And what about the Astrarium?" asked Lily. "Do you know . . . ?"

Of course, Nunkie knew. His dear girls were engaged to perform there. And he had seen some one on his way to the theatre: the opening would take place in a month . . . in six weeks at the latest. . . .

The architect—"You know, Lily?" said Nunkie—the architect who used to hang about on the stage, in the passages, on some pretext or other—to flirt with the girls, apparently—was seeing to everything for Kellermann, taking measurements, drawing out plans.

"Everything is ready in advance, everything's ordered; they've only got to put the things in their places; the workmen will start to-morrow."

"So that's what he came for!" thought Lily, angrily. "The damned parley-voo!"

"And your Pa, you know," continued Nunkie, "will be there too, with his New Trickers: it would have been easy for you to get there first," he added, with a meaning smile.

"The New Trickers! Daisy Woolly-legs!" stammered Lily, turning pale. "Who told you so?"

"I'm sure of it; I had it from Jimmy himself," replied Nunkie.

"Jimmy told you? And what has Jimmy to do with it?" asked Lily, anguish-stricken.

"What has he to do with it? Why, he's simply going to top the bill," said Nunkie. "And, besides, Kellermann has left it to him to make out the programme. Why, didn't you know? . . . Your friend Jimmy . . .?"

She was in the street once more, feeling weak-kneed and light-headed. She leant on Glass-Eye's arm; she had a pain in her side from the emotion. She felt inclined to enter a café, to get drunk on champagne, to forget.

The next day, an awful headache made her keep her room.

"To-morrow," she said to Glass-Eye, "to-morrow I will fetch my bike."

She dared not go out; she felt as if it was written on her forehead:

"The New Trickers at the Astrarium! Daisy Woolly-legs at the Astrarium and not you!"

And, "to-morrow," again she spent the day stretched on her bed. And the next day . . . well, as she had to . . . as her bike was her bread-winner, after all . . . her only bread-winner, whatever happened . . .

"Come on, Glass-Eye! Let's go for the bike! I don't care if I do play the darky at Earl's Court!"

But, on reaching the Bijou, she could not restrain a cry. Nunkie had spoken the truth; they were at work

everywhere, unloading joists, running up scaffoldings, attacking the theatre from every side. Her friend the architect passed, looking very busy, greeted her with a "Hullo, Lily!" But Lily did not even see him:

"I hope our things are still in the dressing-room. Hurry up, Glass-Eye!"

And Lily ran along the passage, where already sacks of plaster had taken the place of the velvet-and-nickel properties. She crossed the stage, which was still untouched, took the dressing-room corridor and there, almost before her door . . . met Jimmy! She felt like turning her back on him, after spitting on the floor, as a mark of contempt; but, after all, no! The coward! They'd see which of them would lower their eyes first, he or she! And she planted hers straight in his face, like a blow of the fist!

Jimmy, who was coming towards her, had a moment of hesitation . . . but it did not last. He soon recovered himself. It would have been obvious to any one seeing that masterful face that here was a man cured of his love, a strong man and sure of himself, a man whom a kid like Lily—Lily had always remained a kid to him and not Mrs. Trampy, not the wife of Trampy, that thief in the night—a man whom a kid like Lily could not have at her beck and call. And he held out his hand, like a good friend, simply, among artistes:

"How do you do, Lily? Delighted to see you."

"Glass-Eye," said Lily, opening the door of her dressing-room, "Glass-Eye, my bag . . . the key of my trunk . . . get out the bike first. One can't turn in this rotten hole," she added, as she entered.

And, as Glass-Eye seemed all day releasing the bike from the hooked-up skirts and tights hanging from the wall, to say nothing of the kicks which she received from the pedals, Lily, grumbling, snatched it out of her hands,

and ordered her maid to go and wait for her in the street, great good-for-nothing that she was !

"So you refuse to speak to me ?" asked Jimmy.

Lily lowered her head, took no more notice of him than if he had not been there, collected her clothes, pulled the golliwog from the wall without the slightest regard, heaped up everything promiscuously in the trunk, thumping it down with her fists, as though eager to have done with it.

"Come, Lily, are you still angry with me ?" asked Jimmy, quite at a loss. "When you took me by surprise that day, at Whitcomb Mansions . . ."

"A lot I care for your love !" growled Lily contemptuously.

"But my friendship, Lily . . ."

"Your friendship," said Lily, "your friendship . . . a rag ! I'll show you how I value your friendship !" she said, flinging a dirty towel on the floor and stamping on it in her rage. "And that Daisy Woolly-legs !" she went on, with an unspeakable expression of scorn on her face.

"What do you mean ?" asked Jimmy, who did not understand.

"Giving that shop to the New Trickers !" she continued violently. "You, who used always to talk of my talent ! Giving a shop like that to those New Trickers, who haven't as much talent among the six of them as I have in my little finger ! . . . You ! To treat me like that ! . . . When I think," cried Lily, beside herself, "when I think that Pa and Ma will be here . . . with tricks stolen from me ! Footy rotter that you are !"

Jimmy understood that the engagement of the New Trickers exasperated Lily : a question of outraged pride, of professional jealousy. He tried to explain : she had already performed in Paris and Kellermann insisted on that. He, Jimmy, wasn't altogether the master. The New Trickers were very clever, very original, very new. . . ,

"And I'm only fit to throw to the dogs, eh?" cried Lily, furiously. "And that rot about having performed in Paris: the Graces have performed in Paris and they're to be at the Astrarium, and why not I? Because you're my friend, perhaps. Such a friend! When it would have been so easy for you to do me that service. But no one ever does anything to please me! Yes, strangers, gentlemen in the front boxes: but not friends like you! You always bore me a grudge for marrying Trampy. . . . And who knows what people say of me behind my back . . . that I cut my turn . . . that I do less than I might. You know what I can do, damn it! And it's work I want, work! I'm not what you think! I'm not one of those . . . not I! I'd rather chew glass than take any of that!"

And Lily spoke with nervous movements of the shoulder and fiery glances and she forced Jimmy to lower his eyes and she told him what she thought of him straight out, told him all her heaped-up rankling spite, told him all she had at heart, in words round and solid enough to build a tower of Babel on:

"And I would have given my life, yes, given my life to perform here! However, it's done now, isn't it? And it can't be undone," said Lily, more calmly, and two tears sprang to her eyelids. . . . Then, while Jimmy, plunged in his own thoughts, watched her without speaking and listened to her like a judge, "You've nothing to say to me, eh?" she continued, closing her trunk with a thump of the fist. "Nor I either. Then help me carry down my hamper: you haven't helped me get into the Astrarium; at least you can help me get out of it. No? You refuse? And you so generous!" she said, with a scornful laugh. "Well, then, help me take it on my shoulders. No? Not even that? Then I must try by myself . . . and never mind if I do get crushed! *That's* all I care for my life now!" added Lily, snapping her fingers.

"But, Lily," said Jimmy, taking up the hamper, "you're going out of your senses ; you know that . . ."

Jimmy could find nothing to say. He was pained to the bottom of his heart . . . for the grief which he was causing her. The tone of feverish banter which Lily was adopting upset him more than her anger had done. He felt himself filled with pity for that poor little creature standing at bay.

With a turn of the hip, Jimmy jerked to his shoulder the great basket trunk which contained all Lily's fortune. It was not very heavy : tights, spangled skirts, faded flowers. . . . And, in the passage, down-stairs, the astounded stage-doorkeeper saw the famous bill-topper submissively carrying the trunk of the bicyclist, who walked in front of him, wheeling her machine beside her.

## VI

THE fortnight that followed upon this meeting was such a strenuous one for Jimmy, with eighteen hours out of the twenty-four spent at the Astrarium, among the day and night gangs ; his life was such a slavery that he had hardly time to think of Lily. But he did think of her, for all that. He seemed to hear her still. Yes, he confessed to himself, he had, perhaps, believed . . . he had, in fact, been told that Lily was Lily no longer. . . . But he had just been admiring her magnificent anger. He had seen her eaten up with ambition, and that brave little face lifted up to his. Twenty times over, he was on the point of saying something to her ; but he must see first. . . . Would she herself be willing ? Even though she had seemed resolved to do anything ?

"Meanwhile," thought Jimmy, as on the former occasion, when she was ill, in Berlin, "how are we to help her out of this . . . how ?"

And he was caught in the whirlwind again : it was Jimmy here, Jimmy there. He had to be in ten places at once. Not that he was manager or stage-manager : his was a special case. Since his return from America, Jimmy possessed an even more thorough knowledge of all the machinery of the theatre. He had his memorandum-books filled with notes, his head crammed with new ideas. He had a smattering of everything, a vast amount of experience picked up in rushing about the world. After his triumphs with "Bridging the Abyss," the managers,

knowing that he had prepared something different, something strange and terrible, without knowing exactly what, had bombarded him with offers: Chicago, Berlin, London. A conversation with Kellermann, whom the Astrarium held body and soul, had determined the matter otherwise: he would open the Astrarium with Jimmy and remodel the theatre from top to bottom in view of the new trick, the most sensational that had ever been seen. And Jimmy should make the necessary alterations, he should have a free hand.

Jimmy accepted. To open in a theatre made for himself seemed preferable, to Jimmy, to launching his new invention in a closed hall, such as the London Hippodrome, for instance, which did not provide the aperture in the roof, the door opening on the stars, which he required to obtain his effect upon the crowd. And that was why, in the works at the Astrarium, everything turned upon Jimmy. He was responsible to both Kellermann and himself. For that matter, he was fully equal to the interests at stake. Kellermann, a great judge of men, entrusted everything to Jimmy, the sensational bill-topper, removed above all jealousy; and he left it to his experience to construct the programme. Kellermann himself, the chief and master, rarely left London; he managed all his theatres from his office, with the 'phone at his ear, or else flew like the wind in every direction, buying a theatre here, picking up a star there, on the wing. It was not until the third week that he came to see for himself how the works were doing and to discuss the accounts. His broad back was seen, followed by Jimmy, plunging down the plastered corridors, passing under the scaffoldings. He looked like a conqueror, tracing with his finger the plan of the palace that was to rise upon the ruins of the destroyed city; or else he would point out things with a jerk of the chin:

"The proscenium pushed forward to here, eh, Jimmy?"



A cluster of electric lights here. Another there. And what about your trick, Jimmy ? ”

“ You must imagine the house in darkness,” said Jimmy, “ and blue and green rays falling on the stage from above. Through the blue, we send a great dazzling beam, from over there, lighting up every inch of the house, a terrific light, the light of the Last Judgment. . . . ”

“ Good ! ” said Kellermann. “ We want two or three fits of hysterics at the opening : real ones, not hired at two bob a night,” he added with a wink. “ They’re working, up there,” he continued, a piece of old plaster falling on his shoulder, as they crossed the floor of the house, denuded of its seats.

“ It’s the opening in the roof,” said Jimmy. “ I should have liked to show you . . . the staircase is blocked with scaffoldings. . . . ”

But Kellermann, at the risk of breaking his neck, had already grasped the rungs of a provisional ladder, made of spokes stuck through one of the four beams that rose from the floor to the ceiling and supported it, while the whole of the space between them was being opened. The architect was there when Kellermann came out on the roof. He showed him four piers of strong masonry which were being built against the outer walls, explained that two T irons of considerable strength would rest with their ends on the piers and run across the roofing from wall to wall. Two other irons, also parallel, but running lengthwise, would be bolted to the first two. This arrangement would make a horizontal frame of twenty feet by thirty. They would then remove the beams which supported the roof during the operations. When the plastering was finished and the gilding applied, this would form, as seen from below, a handsome frame to the sky. The architect also explained how the truncated roof would be secured to the frame, making a whole as firm as a rock, and how a

light iron sash, completely glazed, could be drawn along the two transverse T irons, thus opening or closing the hall as desired.

"The whole thing's worked from below by electricity," said Jimmy.

"How long will it take?" asked Kellermann.

"It's all ready. It's only got to be fixed up," said the architect.

"And how much? Give me the detailed account to-night, at the station. I'll study it on my way to Berlin." And, turning to the workmen, "*Faites vite! Dépêchez!*"

They were the only words of French he knew, a vocabulary no more extensive than Lily's, but of a different kind.

"And the lights?" asked Kellermann, before he went down again.

"Here, there," said Jimmy, "on steel rods, connected by electric wires."

"That'll dish the Berlin Winter Garden, with its stars set in black velvet," said Kellermann.

And he followed Jimmy toward the stage wall, which stood above the roof of the auditorium. Here some other workmen were cutting a doorway.

"Let's go and see the floor now."

And Kellermann plunged through the door, followed by Jimmy. They crossed the fly-galleries and made for the blocked staircases. Before they went down, Jimmy called his attention to a pulley which was being fixed to the ceiling and which was to carry a rope with a stirrup for the performer's foot, to enable him to reach the stage in a few seconds, after doing the trick.

"Very good," said Kellermann.

In half an hour, he had visited everything: the roof, the flies, the cellar, the auditorium, the front entrance. Workmen were hurrying everywhere. Kellermann encouraged them, with a slap on the shoulder:

*"Dépêchez ! Faites vite !"*

They were working at everything at once, from the new installation of electric light and the steam heating-apparatus, in the basement, to the emergency exits and the main lobby. Upholsterers were taking measurements in the front boxes. The sound of the hammer rang out from top to bottom, amid a cloud of dust ; men climbed the scaffoldings, hoisted up things ; and the sight of all this activity gave the impression of a plan thought out in advance, executed with great certainty, but incomprehensible to any one not in the secret. There could be no doubt but that the spectacle which was being prepared would be of a sensational character : even the back-wall of the stage, which was empty at that moment, had been altered. By clearing away a few dressing-rooms, they had raised the floor and ceiling of the huge property-entrance. It had been closed up at the back and fitted with a sliding door in front.

"The bird's cage," said Jimmy, with a smile.

"And how does it get out ?" asked Kellermann.

"Windlasses here . . . a rope up above . . . hooks," said Jimmy.

"And when will it be fixed ?"

"Finished next week ; everything's ready, the trials have been made. It will only need a little practice, here, on the spot, calculating the effort, getting used to the distance."

"House packed for six months ! Here's a cigar to your success, Jimmy ! Come and have a drink at the bar ; we'll settle the programme."

A moment later, the two entered the bar where, a fortnight earlier, Lily had handed round the hat a second time for old Martello and his Bambinis and where the artistes, who had already dispersed toward the four corners of Europe, had raised their glasses to the success of the

Astrarium. And here, in the little back room, which was deserted by the artistes, now that the theatre was closed, but which would soon again be the intersecting point of so many vagabond existences . . . where the nigger cake-walker from Chicago would play poker with the equilibrist from Japan . . . where the pros and the bosses would exchange complaints about the strictness of the regulations concerning the work of apprentices . . . where little girls, worth their weight in gold, would come, coyly, encompassed by Pas and Mas, but with glances askance at flight ; in this corner where funny men would swallow mixed drinks and talk through their noses ; here, under the frames containing row upon row of signed photographs of artistes : human pyramids, girls in a knot, foaming muslins, Apollos and Venuses all muscles ; here, in Pros' Corner, Kellermann, the man for whom all those people toiled and moiled, head down or feet in the air ; the man from whom a thousand persons drew salaries night after night, Kellermann lit his cigar, sat down at a table with Jimmy, over a bottle of beer, and, pencil and notebook in hand :

" Let's see the programme."

Jimmy, on his side, took a written list from his pocket and laid it on the table.

It goes without saying that the select turns which they were about to discuss had long been engaged for Kellermann's different music-halls, some of them two or three years ahead, as often happens in the case of the great bill-toppers, and the question was to choose among the best, so as to insure the triumph of the opening night. For Kellermann, who had as yet appointed no one as manager or stage-manager, the thing was to settle a programme that would discourage any attempt at competition, to have none appearing but stars, without counting those whom he held in reserve for the following

month, before distributing them over his variety-theatres in England, or, later, to every part of Europe, in the "Great Powers Tour" which he proposed to create and of which the Astrarium would be a sort of "commodore" music-hall, or head-quarters. Jimmy only gave his opinion, after which Kellermann would decide.

Kellermann's dream was a model music-hall, something, in its own way, like the Grand Opéra in Paris : a palatial edifice, in a new style of architecture, with friezes displaying bodies in contortion, caryatides, cast 'from life, supporting the springers of the arches, mixed groups of loins and chests with swelling muscles, under the electric lights ; and, in the lobbies, a lavish display of African onyx, Scotch granite and Russian porphyry. The crowd would pass in between Venus and Apollo holding flowers and lights ; and there would be music everywhere ; gaiety, noise, red and gold everywhere ; all cares would be laid aside and forgotten on entering ; it would be a hall containing every modern convenience, like the Iroquois at Buffalo or a 'Frisco sky-scraper : newspapers, café, bars, smoking-room, barbers' saloon, telegraph-office, telephone-office, messenger-boys, ticket-office, private rooms in which phonographs would shout out the latest news illustrated with telesteriography, from eight o'clock till midnight. The idea was to create, thirty years ahead of its time, the great popular music-hall, with its ball-rooms, as at Blackpool, its side-shows, a palm-garden, a roof-garden ; to draw to the theatre those who, on getting up from dinner, go to the café and stay there ; to give them an atmosphere of mirth and jollity, of comforting lights, a sort of night forum, a People's Palace, with, in the middle, in the sumptuous hall, facing the furnace that was the stage, a long thrill of three hours' duration.

And he would realize it next year, but he was in a hurry to open now, to plant his flag of victory :

*"Faites vite ! Dépêchez !"*

Dare Devil had won the place for him and Jimmy was bringing him the sensational attraction, the inspired god-send which would pack the Astrarium for six months and fill its till and spread its name far and wide over Europe.

Kellermann thought of this with a puff at his cigar, after glancing at the photos on the wall, and then, suddenly :

"Let's see the programme."

"Nothing but bill-toppers," said Jimmy. "Picked turns from the first to the last . . ."

"Which will be you," Kellermann broke in.

"Yes . . . I . . . or somebody else . . ."

"What do you mean, somebody else ?"

"Perhaps," said Jimmy, "to heighten the effect of my turn . . . for reasons which I'll explain to you . . . perhaps it would be better to have a woman . . . better for the success of the attraction !" he hastened to add, at an astonished gesture of Kellermann's.

"And . . . are you sure ?" asked the other.

"I think so," said Jimmy.

"The programme first," said Kellermann, returning to his notes.

"We open with a gallery in marble and gold, something showy and quaint, in the Potsdam style, with a negress inside."

"I know : Light of Asia, eh ? The armless Chinese girl whom I discovered at Poplar . . . Music of cymbals and triangles, eh ?"

"No," said Jimmy. "I have something better . . . more æsthetic, less cruel . . . a Soudanese woman from Chicago. She walks on to the stage in a low-necked dress . . . a magnificent woman . . . a creamy complexion, with a touch of pink . . . golden hair . . ."

"You said a negress," interrupted Kellermann.

"Wait. . . . A splendid voice . . . classical music. . . . Then a wild African melody ; she feels a flutter of homesickness ; the perspiration streams down her face ; she presses the sponge soaked in water, hidden beneath her wig ; and the white enamel of the shoulders, the pink cheeks all trickle away and, finally, she appears, black as ebony, and, to the roll of the kettle-drums, does a dishevelled dance, kicking up her legs like a puppet on a string . . . Patti-Patty . . . talent and absurdity mixed . . . a crazy toy . . . movement and noise, while the hall fills."

"Next ? " asked Kellermann.

"Next, without any interval, directly after that performance by the court fool before his majesty the audience, the curtain rises upon a park . . . and the New Trickers chasing one another among the trees."

"The New Trickers !" said Kellermann. "Bicyclists : that's very stale. And, besides, what about you ?"

"Has one ever," asked Jimmy, "seen a music-hall give two similar special turns, two bicycle turns, for instance, in the same show ?"

"Absurd !" said Kellermann. "Explain yourself."

"It's to differentiate, from the very first, between my invention and trick-riding," replied Jimmy, "to show, once and for all, that mine has nothing in common with the ordinary turns you see on the stage : ' Bridging the Abyss ' or ' Looping the Loop. ' "

"You may be right," said Kellermann. "It will prevent confusion ; yours is purely scientific. And the New Trickers : tights ? bloomers ?"

"Skirts, all in white, Warwick style," said Jimmy. "A school-girls' spree : see-saw on the bike . . . somersaults over the benches . . . waltzes, lively tunes ; an impression of gaiety and happiness. The star is a statue on a pedestal in the park. The others throw flowers to

her. She wakes ; steps down : 'Hullo, a bike !' And then a special tune for the star and a waltz on the back-wheel, amid the admiring circle of school-girls."

"All right," said Kellermann. "And what's the price of the New Trickers ?"

"So much."

And he jotted it down in his note-book, near the prices of Dare Devil and Cataplasm.

Jimmy also took notes, mentioned the names of the great serio, the great comic singer, with their figures :

"So much."

"They earn their money easily, those two !" grunted Kellermann. "But I've got to submit to it, I suppose. Next ?"

Jimmy only described the spectacular turns. Kellermann listened, saw it in his head : a corner of untamed nature, a valley in the mountains, blue distances, sunshine in the foreground. The Three Graces arrive all out of breath. . . .

"You understand," said Jimmy, "they are supposed to have been chasing the deer or hunting butterflies. . . . As a matter of fact, Mr. Fuchs will have made them do their Sandow, before going on, to bring the blood to their cheeks ; he's full of ideas, is Mr. Fuchs. On arriving, a moment's rest, an adorable group in all the splendour of the nude . . . sweet, solemn music . . . and then a glorious performance, a sort of human cluster hanging from the trapezes, something healthy and robust."

"All right," said Kellermann, putting a cross in his note-book opposite the Three Graces. "And next ?"

With Kellermann it was always "And next ?" like a man who never has more than just so many minutes to spare, because his train's waiting.

It was a curious sight to see the two talking together in a low voice, with an occasional glance at the door when



some indiscreet person looked in. They might have been taken for a pair of conspirators plotting a move ; no one would ever have suspected that they were composing a performance, unique of its sort, which would be famous to-morrow. Everything was provided for : scenery, music, the colour of the dresses, effects of light, the alternate doses of laughter or grace or terror to be served up to the audience ; everything was discussed, then and there, in all its details, down to those two sketch-comedians, with faces streaked red and white, against a back-drop representing an old English street, two drunken sports, with hats bashed in, coats turned inside out, ten minutes of mad tricks and inhuman cries ; for the audience must have its pittance of the grotesque as well.

There was a herd of comic elephants, five enormous animals in a Hindoo setting ; and no master on the stage, no boss, no prof : they all obeyed a whistle blown in the wings. And, conducting the orchestra with an air of unspeakable gravity, a monkey, Mozart II., a caricature of an infant prodigy, made the huge brutes perform their evolutions, to the Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust*. Then, in his enthusiasm, Mozart sent his desk flying into the air, followed by his coat, his shoes, his conductor's bâton, and ended by seizing his tail in his hand and beating time with that.

"That dishes Orpheus and Mad-darewski," said Kellermann. "And next ?"

The entr'acte came next, with portraits and biographies of the artistes distributed among the audience.

"Yes, yes," said Kellermann, laughing. "Old English families . . . clergymen's daughters. . . ."

"Learnt all that with their governesses, as a surprise for their Pa and Ma !" continued Jimmy. "Mozart II., a favourite of the King of Lahore ; Patti-Patty, a descendant of the Queen of Sheba : we've got to do it. There's no getting away from it."

"We must hide the bruises," said Kellermann. "And next?"

"Next, I hope to have the Bambinis: ten minutes of rosy mirth; real biographical babies, born with 'that' in their blood; brother and sister; two marvels. I shall obtain permission for them to appear, though they're under the age; the old father is dying, the famous Martello."

"We must engage them for my tour," said Kellermann.

"If the old man doesn't die first: in that case, there's a brother who will come and claim them, it seems. They're a fortune, the two Bambinis, to whoever secures them."

"One dress-coat more on the stage," said Kellermann. "And next?"

"Topsy Turvy Tom."

"Oh, yes, I know!" said Kellermann, laughing. "The fellow who used to wear leaden armlets to harden his muscles and smash Clifton's jaw."

"That's the one," said Jimmy, laughing in his turn. "A threat of Clifton's, who said that he would 'make him dance the hornpipe on his hands, damn it!' suggested the idea of a turn to him, so they say. He set to work with superhuman energy and now he is a bill-topper. . . ."

"Well done!" cried Kellermann, banging his fist on the table. "There's no country but old England can turn out bulldogs like that, lads who jump from the gutter to the top of the bill! That's what I call a man! And what's his turn like?"

"A scene of his own: the front of a palace. A pink marble figure, naked down to the waist, supports a huge cornice. A thunder of big drums, a flash of limelight, and the palace splits from top to bottom. The figure staggers, falls on its hands and gives a stupendous acrobatic performance: somersaults on the hands; waltzing; threading the ball: 'the hornpipe, damn it!' And then Tom stands on his feet, all in shadow. A powerful ray of

light is thrown upon him ; and you see the muscles of the abdomen slowly moving, the pectoral muscles quivering, the deltoids leaping and starting, the biceps swelling ; and, when he turns round, the rhomboids hollowing out, the muscles of the back rolling : the triumph of the human machine . . . and of Tom."

" And of will," said Kellermann. " How much ? "

" So much."

" It's worth it. And next ? "

" Roofers, high-kickers : the Merry Wives. We begin with dancing and end with dancing. The puppets make their bow to the public before being put away in their boxes . . . the curtain falls . . . and good-night ! "

" And then you come ! "

" Then I come," said Jimmy. " Or *she*."

" Your invention," said Kellermann, seriously, " is not a music-hall entertainment. It is, undoubtedly, the greatest of all scientific toys, a marvel of modern ingenuity. Do you really want a pair of tights on the top of that ? And, first of all, where will you find the woman who will dare ? "

" That's the question, obviously," admitted Jimmy.

Not that Jimmy need have been in love with Lily to think of her. It had first just passed through his head, no more. But, on reflection, it had appeared to him that, in the theatre, the beauty of a Lily would add greatly to the success of his attraction. To work his invention in public was different from experimenting with it in his shed in London. It was leaving the laboratory to take its place in life ; and it would be a triumph to see the daring trick succeed, every day, at the fixed hour, within a restricted compass ; to see that machine go through the opening above ; to see it worked by a young girl in whom one would have suspected neither the strength nor the nerve : it would make the public infer the excellence

of the engine. Now Jimmy was possessed, above all, of scientific enthusiasm. His machine before everything ; not his personal triumph, his machine. He dreamt of giving that added grace to his diagrams ; and he considered that there was no disadvantage in allowing science to be introduced by youth and beauty. Moreover, Jimmy was a little heavy for an apparatus in which he had even suppressed the motor, in order to make it more easily manageable . . . a lighter body would perhaps be better. . . . Lily, Lily was the ideal operator ; but was she capable of it ? Jimmy had confidence in her. Jimmy, certainly, did not allow sentiment to mix in his affairs ; there was the weight of his responsibility to consider. But then there was also his meeting with Lily in the dressing-room passage. And he had understood her mental agony. He had seen the gleam in her eyes and so great a display of energy in her face that Jimmy had resolved to try her ; and he would judge her much better by the way in which she should face death.

That is what Jimmy explained to the manager, leaving a good deal untold, of course, and Kellermann retired behind the smoke of his cigar, listened, approved :

" It's your affair, when all is said and done. All you want is success, I suppose. And will you arrange with her . . . with your . . . what did you say her name was ? "

" Lily."

" There are so many Lilies ; and, if somebody has to break his or her back, I had rather it was a Lily, one out of the bunch, than you."

Lily, meanwhile, was loitering outside. Kellermann and Jimmy had no notion that the girl about whom they were talking was quite close to them, thinking of them. Lily had heard an artiste say that Kellermann was visiting

the Astrarium. She had come in all haste, impelled by some vague hope. Chance would have it that she was still in Paris. Everything, besides, seemed to be keeping her there: an agent, the day after her interview with Jimmy, had advised her to stay a few days longer; there might be something important for her. . . . Lily could not understand in what way; however, she had stayed, though she was almost without means of support. She began by trying to sell her jewels, the fifty-pound diamond brooch, among others, which that lord had given her in England: the jeweller handed it back to her, saying it might be worth eight francs! That meant destitution. And yet hope always returned to her in one way or another. She had even received three blue bank-notes, three hundred francs, in an envelope. Her fortnight at the Bijou! No doubt about it, they were paying the artistes' salaries; perhaps the Federation had taken the matter up. Three hundred francs: not enough to pay Glass-Eye or to give Jimmy, but just sufficient to clear her small debts, buy some new dresses and take her to London to play the ducky at Earl's Court. Oh, what a ridiculous come-down! And so, when she learnt that Kellermann was at the Astrarium, she took her courage in both hands: she would see Kellermann. She would try the fascination of her smile upon him. She would be settled at once and for ever. . . . When she thought of the New Trickers, her blood seemed to stand still in her veins: the New Trickers at the Astrarium! And Jimmy, the mean cur, not to have got her that shop, when she had such a splendid idea: Lady Godiva on a bike! And a scene of her own: the front of Peeping Tom's club, with all the boys at the windows!

Just then, Kellermann came out of the bar. She hurried up to him and introduced herself:

"Miss Lily."

"Which one?" said Kellermann. "Excuse me; no time now. See Jimmy, will you?"

And he plunged into a cab and shouted an address to the driver.

Lily stood stupefied, as she watched the cab disappear. This time it was finished, quite finished. . . . She gave a last glance at the Astrarium and sighed. . . .

"Lily!" It was Jimmy coming out and crossing the street. "Hullo, Lily!"

She did not reply.

"Listen, Lily," said Jimmy, gently and gravely. "You wanted to get there the other day, didn't you? You told me you would do anything for that."

"To take the place of the New Trickers, yes!" exclaimed Lily. "I'd have risked my life!"

"The New Trickers are there," said Jimmy, "and are going to remain. Listen to me. What I have to propose to you is very serious. It's for something else. . . ."

"What else? You know that's all I'm good for . . . to go round and round . . . you know it quite well," cried Lily, her face drawn with impotent anger.

"I know what you can do. Look here: would you like to be above the New Trickers? Would you like to top the bill? Are you ready to do everything for that?"

"May God forgive you for mocking at me!"

"Will you top the bill?" asked Jimmy again, in an accent that sent a thrill down her back. "Are you ready to risk everything for that? Answer me: yes or no?"

"Yes," cried Lily. "My life, everything, damn it!"

"Then come with me," said Jimmy, entering the Astrarium.

## PART FOURTH

# AMONG THE STARS

### I

JIMMY was greatly excited when he led Lily into the Astrarium. To understand his feelings fully, one would have to know his life since the evening when, at Whitcomb Mansions, he had looked Lily in the face and answered no. He realized then, from the emotion which he experienced, how great a place Lily had filled in his heart: Lily, the little passenger from New York to Liverpool; the girl who came to see him in his shop in Gresse Street; the Lily whom he dreamed of helping out of that, when he saw her on the stage, from up in the fly-galleries; the one whom he had tried to take away from Trampy; the poor sick girl in Berlin: those Lilies whom he felt moving inside him, around him, like a breath of April; all those Lilies; he had broken with them all! Oh, it was hard! Lily should never, never know what courage he had needed to keep silent—he, the man she thought so cold—nor what a tempest . . . oh, if she could only have seen into him! And then . . . he had not met her again. . . .

He, after his engagement at the Hippodrome, went off to America; Lily travelled, on her side. Also, he was a prey to his fixed idea, his great project, always: his ambition increased, the same longing for success which,

formerly, in Gresse Street, had made him spend nights in study after days of toil, at the time when, under Lily's influence, his roaming thoughts built castles in the air, when he felt awakening within himself his racial instinct as an heroic seeker after lucrative adventures.

And his ambition took great strides forward, was not limited, as in Clifton's case, to upsetting the fat freaks or training New Zealanders to spin round and round. He dreamed of a useful life, based upon his own efforts. He wished to found his future upon a discovery of his own, which had haunted him for long and which had ripened in Berlin, between his flights in "Bridging the Abyss;" a thing at which he worked incessantly in Whitcomb Mansions; and, this time, the stage prowlers should not steal his idea. Jimmy felt sure that, even when the apparatus was at work, he would not fall a victim to the confraternity who, ever on the watch for new tricks, study them, judge of the weak points, copy whatever suits them, including scenery and music, and, sometimes, succeed in earning more money than the inventor himself. Certainly, there were great bill-toppers, creators of sensations who discovered new things, daring risk-alls, nerve-shakers, purveyors of thrills, turning to intelligent account the seductive power which dangerous feats exercise upon the public. Jimmy knew all about that. He was not the only one; but, this time, it was a question of a scientific application which would, beyond a doubt, place him at the head of the pick of the music-hall. It would be pure science and patient calculation: an algebraical hippogriff, with pluck in the saddle.

Jimmy's plans resulted from intuition rather than real knowledge; but learning has nothing to do with the creative spirit. His imagination, unhampered by theories, was all the freer for it. Jimmy had the higher instinct of the born machinist, who is content to use a bit of string



where a school-bred engineer will cram every manner of gear, chains, pulleys and windlasses. It is true that he was assisted in his research by many experiments already tried elsewhere ; but he dreamed of something different and, in the calm of Whitcomb Mansions, had studied without respite :

“ Pooh ! ” he reflected. “ All those sails, all that weight ! Boxes heaped one on the top of the other—cubes to catch the air—a man sitting inert in a basket, with his hand on a lever and a crank : it’s as though one tried to make a stuffed bird fly ! And what becomes of the man in all that ? What are the leaps in bridging the abyss,” he thought, “ if not a fractional flight ? If I had two flat surfaces, one on either side, and a motor behind me, it seems to me that I should continue to go upwards . . . and the best rudder would be the man riding it, with his flexible body . . . a live weight is less heavy than a dead weight. . . . How many hundred volts does pluck stand for . . . or hatred . . . or love ? ”

And, always, his inventive imagination built on without respite, pulled down, built up again.

His daily success at the Hippodrome did not divert him from the end he had in view. “ Bridging the Abyss,” for him, was but a means of making money, to enable him to climb higher. He thought of nothing but that ; and this obsession of the future made him scorn or rather overlook the temptations of the stage. He would only have had to choose among the lot. All, down to the great Parisienne, would have jumped at a champagne-supper with Jimmy, the famous bill-topper, the man who looked like the swells in the front boxes and who was making such a pile. But Jimmy knew all about that : he left the theatre in the quietest way, took a glass of ale with the boys or girls at the Crown, had a light supper and went home. And sometimes a frenzy for work made him rush straight to his

table. And he read treatises, made diagrams, took up his compasses again . . . or else stayed as he was, with his chin in his hand, plunged in his thoughts . . . his mind soaring far above London . . . and, suddenly :

"Damn it !" he would growl, banging his fist on the table. "That thief in the night ! What a sweet wife he got hold of ! Poor Lily, to fall into such hands ! Ah, yes, she would have done better to stay at home !"

And Jimmy got to work again, to forget Lily ; and he kept on thinking of her. . . .

Even during his triumphal tour of the Eastern and Western Trust, that Lily, whom he did *not* love, haunted his memory. At first, he hoped to forget her in his life of excessive activity. And he saw so many theatres, as many as Lily did in England ; so many artistes, on so many stages . . . faces which he had already met in England : fair wigs, scarlet legs, boyish voices ; Roofers, "brothers" and "sisters," over from London, Manchester, or Glasgow. He would have ended by seeing them all again in time. There were other Lilies shooting up, Lilies "that high," elbowed by every vice, petted by every hand, kissed by every pair of lips. His sympathy went out to them all ; and Lily had lived amid all that ; it was just her life. He found something to remind him of her at every turn, on those stages on which she had performed. He seemed to see her near him, with her light walk, in her little black dress, looking so nice in her "performing-dog" toque : the poor little silly thing, running away with that thief in the night and left alone now, quite alone, it appeared, among the rotten lot. . . .

And he rushed into work, into danger, when he thought of that ; risked terrible leaps in "Bridging the Abyss." He sometimes felt as though he were rushing towards oblivion, into the jaws of death !

And his great project also nearly outweighed Lily's in-

fluence. By dint of composing his machine in his head and studying it on paper, Jimmy grew calmer. He thought less about Lily, or, at least, thought about her only in her interest, not his.

For instance, in that little town in the West which was not on his tour, but in which Trampy had appeared, Jimmy tried to obtain information. He went out of his way to make enquiries. . . . A marriage with Trampy Wheel-Pad? It was impossible to discover anything; and he would not be able to make Lily the magnificent present which he had dreamed of: her divorce from Trampy!

And it was Miss Lily, Miss Lily, always; he not only thought about her . . . he heard her name mentioned. Boys and girls who had seen Lily in England and whom the chances of travel brought across his path in America told him, with many amplifications, of her outrageous adventures, her passion for flirting. She scamped her turn. She paid more attention to her dresses than to her performance. She was extravagant, travelled with her maid, put up at expensive hotels. She received bouquets, my, as big as cabs, and invitations to supper and post-cards covered with x x x x! She had an autograph-book full of declarations of love. Motor-cars, furnished houses: she was offered everything. The son of a lord had ruined himself in jewellery for her, the impersonator was nearly off his head for love of her: gee, she did have a good time! She spent her life receiving chocolates and sweets and distributing her photo as Lady Godiva, with her signature. Lily, according to them, laid waste every heart; men had left wife and children for her sake; her love-affairs were going the round of the world, like her whippings. Lily was "the thing," and game and mustard for Jim Crow.

These tales left Jimmy very sad. He made allowances for professional exaggeration in matters of love as of smackings, but, nevertheless, there must be some truth in

what they said, for it reached him from various sides. Oh, he pitied that dear little Lily from the bottom of his heart! The harm was done, the theatre had spoilt the woman. Oh, how he pitied her! . . . This time, he felt that it was finished between her and him. . . . He, no doubt—who could tell?—would continue his forward progress; and, one day, he would have a wife of his own, a woman without a past, and he would take his stand firmly on the earth, with a home and love; and Lily, soon, would be little more than a dead memory. . . .

Meanwhile, he heaped up personal observations which he noted every evening, enough to build the ideal music-hall one day. Kellermann, he knew, was cherishing that plan. Perhaps they would realize it together. And his scheme, his scheme was ripe now, the bold stroke which would enable him to attain fame and fortune. He felt the strength within him, if not to succeed, at least to dare everything; and he had now but one idea, to return to England, in spite of magnificent offers from Australia.

The moment he reached London, he set to work. And he fixed up the whole apparatus at his leisure, in the shed which he had kept on, notwithstanding the cost: a sort of large hall in which he had already rehearsed his "Bridging the Abyss." Here, with a couple of confidential assistants, he worked from morning till night, correcting, revising, improving, in the midst of stretched cords and nets. And then came his interview with Kellermann, his engagement at the Astrarium, his meeting with Lily in the dressing-room passage. . . .

And it was untrue! What they had said about her was a lie! Lily had not fallen! Jimmy, merely at that moment's sight of her, would have sworn it in the face of the whole world: the tales about Lily, due probably to professional boasting on her own part, were false! He knew it, because he had seen her glorious anger and

the flash from her chaste eyes. And he would give Lily that joy—he owed at least as much as that to his dead love—and he would see that it was all right. It would not be a question of :

“ Pa, I can’t ! ”

“ But you’ve got to, my little lady ! ”

She would have to dare of her own accord, with a will of adamant, and Lily would do it, Jimmy was sure of that. He had found the partner wanted for his success, and he rejoiced to the bottom of his heart as he led Lily to the stage of the Astrarium.

Lily, on the other hand, felt an anxiety which made her sides ache and her heart beat :

“ What on earth can it be ? ” she asked herself.

But, whatever it was, she would do it if it cost her her skin ! And Lily did not even take the stage oath, so sincere and spontaneous was her resolve.

“ I’ll show you, Lily,” said Jimmy, seeing her look at the hall and the opening in the ceiling as she passed. “ It’s a new trick.”

“ Yes,” said Lily, “ new : it’ll be like the last ; they’ll take it from you as soon as it’s out. It’s like me, the tricks which Pa invented and which the fat freaks cribbed from me. Tricks are always copied, you know they are,” continued Lily, who trembled at the thought of seeing others beside herself topping the bill with that.

“ You needn’t be afraid,” said Jimmy, “ they won’t take this one from me ; and yet I hope, in a few years’ time, to see it all over the place.” . . .

“ All the world on the back-wheel ! ” protested Lily, who was always thinking bike. “ Then what will become of the artistes ? ”

“ In a few years, Lily, people won’t go about on wheels,” said Jimmy jokingly.

“ What will they do then ? ”

"They'll fly!"

Lily would have burst out laughing, in other circumstances; but they had now reached the stage. The iron curtain was down. She looked round with scared eyes for something out of the common. Jimmy, after making sure that they were quite alone, walked up to the monster's cage, slid back the door. . . .

The aerobike, with wings wide open, seemed to loom out of the darkness.

"My! It's a bird! And it's a bike too! I knew it!" cried Lily, clapping her hands. "Well done, Jimmy! And do you want me to get up on it? Come along! Just wait till I take my hat off," she went on, drawing out the hat-pins from under her big feathers.

"Not so fast!" said Jimmy, laughing. "Keep calm! We'll start next week. There are a good many little things to make sure of first; and then I must put up a cable in case of a fall."

"I don't care a hang for a fall," cried Lily, immensely excited. "You'll soon see if I'm afraid!"

"Be serious, Lily. Listen to me," replied Jimmy. "Yes, you will have to stand on the back-wheel, but not to ride round the stage. You will have to start at full speed and then go up and up, straight up, into space and then shoot out through a hole which they are making in the roof."

"Yes," said Lily, "I saw. . . . My, that makes a good distance! And, when I'm through the hole, what do I do up there? Go on. . . .!"

"I'll explain all that to you," said Jimmy.

"Dive into the street, eh?" asked Lily, in her Spartan voice. "Well, I don't care! Anything! I'll do anything! . . . And I'll show them," she added, to herself, "if one can do *that* through one's gentlemen friends!"

But she calmed herself: she did not want to appear

surprised before Jimmy. The right thing was to take it as something very natural, like a lady who is used to the best.

Jimmy, meanwhile, was explaining his trick :

"We shan't fly at once," he said. "We shall practise on the stand to learn how the handles work. The machine isn't perfect, it can only be ridden by a professional and a very clever one at that. Look here," he continued, "it's the principle of the back-wheel: you'll have to keep your side-balance and front and back; but you'll do it, I'm sure of that. *I've* done it."

"What you can do, a man," Lily interrupted, "I can do too. One can do anything on the bike!"

The machine which Jimmy showed to Lily was a bike just like another, with a few differences in its general construction, bearing upon the services which it was expected to perform. The saddle, for instance, was made to slide backwards and forwards, so that the centre of equilibrium could be shifted with a push of the rider's back. The stability of the apparatus did not depend upon that alone. The ascensional rudder or screw-propeller was fitted to a long piece of bent steel, pinned below the saddle, which, running beside the frame, ended by forming a pedal, so that, with a pressure of the foot, the rider could move it at will, within an arc of some ten degrees. When raised to its highest point, the propeller tended to descend and, consequently, to point the front of the aerobike upwards. When brought still lower, its ascensional force increased and the front of the aerobike pitched downwards. These two extremes would obviously serve only in sudden movements. As for the machine itself, Jimmy had rejected the cumbersome system of cells, which he compared to boxes :

"The shape of a fish for the ship, the shape of a bird for the flying-machine," he said.

He stuck to that principle and he had first experimented with reduced models, shaped like a bird, sending them up anyhow, to see. He had ended by constructing one which preserved its stability when gliding over the atmospheric layers. He had thus been led to construct wings with a slightly rounded surface, whose coefficient of yield was nearly double that of wings with flat surfaces. The width of the wings was about five feet and their length about sixteen. They tapered a little, were drawn out in front and widened at the opposite end, so as to get a more powerful hold of the air. They were both light and strong. These two wings, parallel to the machine, were fastened to it in the middle by a pin below the saddle-pillar, which brought their axis to the centre of gravity. Other ingenious and special arrangements made the apparatus very manageable.

Jimmy explained it all to Lily, who listened attentively: "If I carried my motor," he said, "I should have a bigger surface. But, on the stage, we have no room and we shall acquire speed from an inclined plane, as at the start of 'Looping the Loop.' As for the side-steering, the front-wheel, with its spokes fitted with canvas, will steer the aerobike to left or right at a touch of the handle-bar, as in ordinary riding; and there you are, Lily!"

"My!" said Lily, bewildered by all this complicated apparatus. "Did you work it all out on paper? Is this your brain-work in Berlin and in . . . ? It's enough to drive one mad!"

"When you're on it, Lily," said Jimmy, smiling, "you'll have to work also, I promise you. But, with your talent, you'll manage better than I should. And, to-morrow," he added, "I will give you something on account of your salary."

"No, I have money," said Lily, very proudly and fearing lest she should wear out her luck by adding that to it, by being paid for doing nothing. . . ."



Lily spent the whole week in a fever of expectation ; she did not know where she was for delight. But she stifled that feeling within herself. And it was owing to her talent, all owing to her talent ! When people wanted a difficult trick done, they did not go to Daisy or the fat freaks ; no, they came to little Lily ! And it was settled, she wanted no more familiarity, now that she was going to top the bill at the Astrarium ! A lady should be more reserved in her friendships : she would make herself very short-sighted, so short-sighted as to be almost blind, when she met the rotten lot ! Resolved, that she would give up saying, " Damn it ! " give up talking of smackings and using vulgar expressions :

" Do you hear, Glass-Eye ? " she said, calling her maid to witness. " You're to box my ears if you catch me at it again ! "

The thought of having to handle that delicate machine increased Lily's importance in her own eyes. She had noticed that Poland, apart from an inordinate love of champagne-suppers, had very nice manners : Lily would profit by her example and become more refined ; she would show Pa and Ma the kind of Lily they had lost and she would crush them with the amount of her salary ! She would earn more by herself than their whole troupe. She would let them know it, even if she had to do the trick for nothing, for glory, to see her Ma beg her pardon on her knees ! She had recovered all the pride of her eighteen years, all her freshness, in a day : the touch of bitterness about her lips had changed into a smile. It would have taken very little more to make her dance with joy. But she restrained herself, dared not believe in her happiness ; and she was quite decided not to accept anything from Jimmy before earning it. It was bad enough to owe him that thousand marks. She made herself a nice practising-dress and spent the morning in

bed, reading a novel of fashionable life, of which the heroine was called Lily, like herself ! And she, too, would become a society-girl, just to show them, damn it ! But, suddenly, catching herself at fault, she laughed and asked Glass-Eye for a box on the ear ; and a desperate pillow-fight ensued, in which they indulged whole-heartedly, like two regular tom-boys who loved to wrestle and punch each other. And it put her in a good humour for the rest of the day. She went shopping through the windows, only bought herself a spray of roses to fasten to her bodice. She went to the Astrarium, walked in as though the place belonged to her, followed by her maid. She examined the works with the eye of an expert. Three days, three days more and she would begin to rehearse ! Her legs were itching to commence.

The alterations to the stage especially interested her. The door of the cage remained closed and Lily looked at the auditorium :

“ Is it possible, after all ? ” she thought.

And she measured the distance with her eye. It seemed enormous to her ; but, never mind, she'd do it ! And she grew wildly enthusiastic in the midst of all that activity of a theatre which was being rearranged for her :

“ For me, Glass-Eye ! All of it for me ! From here,” she said, stamping her foot on the stage, “ from here to right up there ! ” And she pointed to the hole in the roof. “ All that on the bike ! A somersault miles high ! ”

Glass-Eye opened one terrified eye, wondered if Lily was going mad. . . .

Glass-Eye had become dulled through constant obedience, had lost her memory, mixed up her yeses and noes, like those actors who forget their parts through playing them too frequently ; her recent life had been too exciting for her ; and never a sou in her pocket, only barely enough to

eat . . . it was ten times worse than in Rathbone Place. . . . And then that new crotchet of Lily's :

"Can I fly, Glass-Eye, or can't I? Am I a bird or am I not?"

It was enough to make Glass-Eye lose her head. . . . Meanwhile, she kept on trotting behind Lily, who, realizing that she would soon be taken up with her rehearsals, took advantage of her last days of liberty to pay visits and show herself a little, accompanied by her maid, like the fine lady that she was. She took the Bambinis some sweets. Poor kids! Their games and laughter no longer filled the hotel with mirth and gaiety: old Martello was getting worse and worse and was now not able to leave his room at all. Lily found a kind word for everybody and was grieved at not having any money which would have allowed her to be generous. That would come later. She worked out a scheme for occupying herself with the children when the old man was gone, for having them always with her, like two dear little lucky charms. It was impossible, of course: never mind, it was the idea of a lady, which she would not have had in the old days, and Lily was pleased with herself for having entertained it.

"I will speak about you to Jimmy," she said to the Bambinis. "I'll get you engaged at the Astrarium, eh?"

And the old man trembled with delight, stammered out his thanks, tried to accompany her to the door, like a princess; and the little boy, to thank her, promised to teach her a way of standing on your head which he had learnt all by himself!

"Poor darlings!" thought Lily, as she left them. "If ever they fall into their brother's hands! They would be better dead! Luckily for them, he has disappeared for good; and his Ave Maria with him . . . unluckily for me!"

For Lily understood how badly her position as a lady went with that name of Mrs. Trampy. It was like dragging a tin kettle at her skirts, to make the people in the street turn round and look at her.

And, more than ever, Trampy posed as a faithful husband. Neither a little pimple, which had lately appeared on his nose, nor his rapidly thinning hair served to take down his arrogance. Always the same old Trampy: great, by Jove! And, with his red lips, his glittering eye and the cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, he made love to second-rate "sisters," inferior Roofers in calico skirts. His glamorous title as the bill-topper's husband still won him a few conquests. And Trampy, especially since Jimmy's return, plumed himself more and more on the fact that he was the husband of his dear little wife.

Lily knew all this and it made her fume with rage at heart; but she showed nothing, pretended, on the contrary, to treat it as a matter of no account. For instance, after her visit to the Bambinis, as she passed an artistes' bar, quite close, there stood Trampy, lording it on the pavement, among a lot of loafing pros. Lily made herself short-sighted to the point of absolute blindness. Trampy caught her, as she passed, with a—

"Hullo, Lily! Hullo, my dear little wife!"

But Lily behaved like a real fine lady, who knew how to put people in their place without calling them names:

"Hullo, Mr. Trampy!" she replied, in a sarcastic tone. "Still got your red-hot stove, Mr. Trampy? Still a success with the girls? And your little pimple, Mr. Trampy? How's that little pimple on your nose doing? Kind regards, Mr. Trampy!"

## II

BUT Lily was grandest of all at rehearsal. She was now no longer a lady: she once more became the Spartan, bare-necked, her hair undone, her body streaming with perspiration; and to work, to work, to make up for lost time! In the mornings, alone on the deserted stage, she practised and practised. . . .

"Come on!" said Jimmy. "And mind you do your work properly," he added, with a laugh, "or else, you know . . ."

And he patted the back of his hand.

"I don't care!" said Lily.

"You may break your head, you know," continued Jimmy, to try her.

"It's none of your damned business, if I do! Show me your tricks. To work!"

And Jimmy showed her a movement to execute on her bike, which she had brought with her: balancings, as in "Bridging the Abyss," an excellent training for the aerobike. And Lily went about it, clear-eyed, hard-cheeked, with all the little muscles contracted on her stubborn forehead, ready to butt at the obstacle. A few falls to begin with, but she jumped up again nimbly:

"That's all right!" she said. "It's part of the game!"

"But stop, stop!" insisted Jimmy. "Be careful!"

They were sometimes on the stage for hours at a time, but to Lily, all wrapped in her work, it seemed so many minutes. She understood the jerk which she was to

give at the moment when, after rolling along the inclined plane, she should shoot out into space for the soaring flight of fifty yards :

"The start, that's the great thing with the back-wheel," she observed. "The rest goes of itself."

"Don't cry till you're out of the wood!" said Jimmy. "It'll be different when you're riding the aerobike."

Lily was longing to begin that famous practice. And, a few days later, she at last had that delight, took that further step towards triumph. Jimmy removed the bird from the cage, fixed it on a stand. When Lily sat in the saddle, she was crimson with pleasure, prouder than a princess sitting on a throne for the first time :

"There!" she said. "Here I am! And what next?"

Jimmy explained the complicated touches—"Press your left foot, there, like that, to make it point upwards"—showed how, explained why; then he passed to the working of the handle-bar—"There, like that, to turn it, there"—and how and why the saddle slipped backwards and forwards.

"And then?"

"That's all."

"That's all?" repeated Lily. "That won't want any smackings! Let's see, like this, eh? Then that. Suppose I'm coming down at full speed. I throw myself backwards, a back push, there, like that. A kick, gently, there, that's it. I'll do it as soon as you like! This minute, if necessary!"

But Jimmy, without replying to these sallies, proceeded methodically. He made her practise again, standing still, with the motor going at half-speed. This was a different impulse: the displacement of the air raised a stormy wind, the dust flew, the scenery hanging from the flies waved to and fro and Lily shook in her saddle under the vibration of the propeller.

"Well, Lily?" said Jimmy. "That shakes you up, eh? That complicates matters?"

"Pooh!" said Lily. "And what about the boards? There are some of them that are pretty rough, too! At Pittsburg, you know, it's like riding over cobble-stones. I prefer that to a stage that's too smooth: it's less treacherous."

A few days later, Jimmy ran up a steel cable from the stage to the opening in the ceiling, which was now finished and covered with a tarpaulin; and Lily was to try the flying. At the time for practice, there was no one in the theatre, from which the scaffoldings had been removed. There were no seats on the floor or in the boxes: everything was being made outside and would be put in place in a day or two. In the afternoon, when there was no practice, the house was filled with workmen, painters, upholsterers, carpenters, whose places were taken by others at night, working by electric light. Ten days more and they would have the triumphal opening; already Paris was covered with picture placards: you saw Tom, as a caryatid, supporting the weight of a palace; the Three Graces entwined in their radiant nudity; the impersonator standing, like a Don Juan, surrounded by a bevy of women: the ballet-girl, the shop-girl, the fine lady; then, beside those, the New Trickers—"My idea!" thought Lily, but she didn't care a jot now—the New Trickers fluttered round Daisy. You saw the elephants; the monkey; Patti-Patty, the white negress; all, all, down to the Bambinis, whom Lily had "got" engaged. The whole programme was reverberated on the walls and hoardings, like a thousand-voiced echo. An even larger poster than the others, all blue, strewn with stars, displayed the aerobike in full flight in the sky; and a human figure, seated upon it, lifted a hand filled with rays.

The mere sight of the posters was enough to stimulate

Lily to the maddest feats of daring. She felt herself firmer than steel, when she thought of the New Trickers and of Pa and Ma, who were coming with Daisy, their farthing dip!

When everything was ready, Jimmy hung the aerobike to the steel cable by two ropes, ten feet long, ending in pulleys which ran along the cable. Each of these two ropes was looped up and the loop secured with thin twine: this was an infallible way of ascertaining if the aerobike weighed down upon them or if it was supporting itself in the air; the two cords acted as a spring balance registering the tension in the rope. Should the twine break, because the aerobike rested on the ropes, then the ropes would unloop and the machine remain hanging without any danger for Lily. This was the way in which Jimmy had worked when learning "his trade as a bird," as he called it; and Lily, he had no doubt, would succeed even better than he did, being more supple, lighter and quite as plucky.

Oh, the rapture with which Lily bestrode the aerobike for the first flight!

Jimmy and two confidential assistants hauled up the machine to the top of the inclined plane that gave it its impetus. Jimmy spent an endless time in verifying and testing everything. The electric wire that set the propeller in motion also caused him uneasiness. It had to unroll behind and follow the aerobike without weighing upon it, without retarding its flight; for the machine, which was necessarily a small one, to be able to move within a confined space, did not carry the additional load of a motor, but only a wire, as wireless transmission of power was not yet available. At last, when everything was provided for, Jimmy allowed Lily to make her trial. He trembled; not that she ran any danger, for a fall was impossible: the machine was stopped, up above, automatically, by a cable



stretched crosswise and fastened to a strong spring, which slowed and stayed the flight within the space of a few yards. But, if the two pieces of twine broke suddenly and if this happened several times in succession, the shocks might end by frightening Lily, for all her self-control.

And Jimmy went on explaining. . . .

"I know," said Lily. "I quite understand. It's like this, like this—yes, I know. It's only a matter of trying. It's a trick I've got to do and that's all about it! Daisy would kill herself on it and so would the fat freaks, but I shan't. I shall succeed."

"Well, then, steady!" cried Jimmy; and his voice rang through the empty theatre. "Go!"

The machine ran down with a swoop, the propeller whirled, Lily gave a magnificent back push when she reached the bottom of the inclined plane; then she went straight up and the two pieces of twine snapped in two. Lily found herself hanging fifty feet in the air, the two pulleys glided slowly backwards towards the stage. Jimmy stopped the machine.

"That's wrong!" cried Lily. "Let's try again. I see what it was: I forgot to push down my foot to point the machine up. It was a slip."

However, at the next attempt, it went better. The twine broke each time, but Lily rectified her movements:

"It's my back push! It's the propeller! It's the front-wheel!"

And, in fact, that was what it was. Jimmy and his assistants, who followed her with their eyes, had noted the fault; and Lily, too, had observed it, in spite of the giddy flight. She was extraordinarily plucky and cool, her eight stone of flesh and bones, unerring and exact, seemed made for the aerobike.

"Bravo, Lily! Hurrah!" cried Jimmy.

She could have screamed for joy in the street as she went

out. Her unparalleled stroke of luck in being chosen tickled her heart. She felt her sense of responsibility increase and also her wish to do well ; no sooner had she left off practising than she was seized with but one idea, to begin again :

“ Eight days more ! ” she thought.

At night, she dreamt of backward jerks, turns of the handle-bar, pushes of the pedal. Poor Glass-Eye, cowering in a corner of the bed, had terrible nightmares ; and, in the morning, after Lily’s kicks, she rose with her ribs smarting and her shins all black and blue. That was all her profit, for Lily had hardly any money left and was not yet drawing a salary.

Lily submitted to every sort of privation with a proud dignity. She would be beholden to nobody. Soon her whole fortune would consist of her box of lucky halfpence and a franc which she had won by turning a cart-wheel, for a bet, among artistes, in the country, to stagger the jossers. And so their little evening meal was a scanty one. A sausage, a little fruit, a cup of tea . . . and then to bed. That was better than listening to the owner of the Hours and all those men who propose things to you. Never, never ! Her work, her work ! Lord, after what she had seen of Poland and the Hours, it was much simpler to work, to be self-reliant. At night, sometimes, Lily would lie awake and think . . . where did that three hundred francs of the Bijou come from ? Not from the Bijou : Cataplasms’ defeat had swallowed up everything and the theatre had long been without a penny ; they used to paper the house with orders distributed among the staff, with instructions to get rid of it anyhow. They were not far short of inviting soldiers from the barracks. There had never been more than two hundred seats paid for of an evening ; it meant flat bankruptcy. And she was the only one who had received anything : why ? how ? Then it must have

been some admirer, but who ? Not the architect, surely, that josser ! Who then ? And why had Jimmy engaged the Bambinis, when she asked him to ? He did everything to please her. He was letting her top the bill : why ? She made a heap of guesses, without getting at the exact truth. . . . Jimmy . . . Jimmy . . . That man, with his coldness, interested her. While so many others were prowling around her, he alone seemed indifferent. She would have liked to see him in love with her . . . to make him suffer a little in his turn ! All the beauty-shows which Lily had seen, all the exhibitions of painted Hours had not spoiled her good taste : Jimmy attracted her, with that strong face of his. What an endless pity that she had married Trampy ! She gave a scornful pout when she thought of it : she married to Trampy ! Married to that soaker : she, a woman made for a man, a creature of flesh and blood, who loved fine muscles, rough sport and virile smackings ! Gee, if she had been a man, it seemed to her that she would have enjoyed spoiling a little Lily : outside working-hours, of course ! And, if a little Lily had asked her, " Do you love me, yes or no ? " she would never have answered no. To-day, she would have bitten off her own tongue rather than put that question to Jimmy ! And yet Jimmy had a dignity about him that pleased her. She could see into the game of the others. The architect, for instance, would give her just a smile in passing, a pleasant word, as one performs a social duty, between two pieces of business. A little amusement, no more : that was all she was to him . . . and to all of them. Jimmy seemed different. But, still, if he loved her, why hadn't he the courage to tell her so ? And, besides, when all was said, she was sick and tired of men ! Some of them ran after you like dogs ; others, damn it, were icicles ! A girl could have Marjutti's figure, Thea's arms, Nancy's legs, Lillian's or Laurence's face . . . and still they would not be satisfied ! And there-

upon Lily pursed her brows, asked herself how and why and went to sleep like a baby.

And the rehearsals continued daily, without respite. Lily became terrible the nearer she drew to success: her indomitable spirit mounted to her heart. Jimmy had difficulty in holding her in. She made twenty flights, thirty flights . . . and the twine no longer broke. From that moment, she was sure of succeeding, always. When you have once succeeded, even if it be but once, you have no right ever to fail again. She had been brought up in those principles, had had them rubbed into her skin. She could not fail now, it was impossible! Even in her flight to the opening up above! She had learnt her "times," she knew how to aim exactly at the right spot. Jimmy hastened to have the roof arranged for the final exit, when the aerobike would disappear before the eyes of the audience in the star-strewn sky. All that remained was to get everything ready for the final rehearsal: the complete show, with all lights lit, as for a gala night. Lily seemed to see it all beforehand. On the day when she realized that no accident was possible, that it was a trick of which she was certain, she stifled a cry of triumph in her throat. She was afraid to believe in it herself, so greatly did it surpass her dreams. She would have stayed for days on the aerobike to experience the delight of the leap into space. It seemed to her as though she were becoming a bird and about to hover in mid-air and leave them all behind her, in the crowd below—all, all—and be a little Lily, flying away on the back-wheel before their noses.

"You'll make yourself ill," said Jimmy. "Take a rest; there's no need to tire yourself; you do it as well as I."

For Jimmy, of course, had done the thing too, if only to show Lily; besides, it was easy for him, who had had so much practice in London and who knew his machine

from end to end. And he appreciated the difficulty all the more. He admired Lily's incredible pluck, her all-devouring ambition and that splendid determination to get out of her scrape, to be a little Lily earning her bread as she knew how, by her work, even if she had to break her neck in the doing of it! And proud to her finger-tips, in spite of the dog's life she had led.

"If I had not procured her this delight," thought Jimmy, "I should never have forgiven myself to the end of my days."

And, from working with her for hours and hours, from holding her by the waist at the early trials, from feeling that little body quiver under his hand, from seeing Lily rush at danger, Jimmy became madly in love with her again . . . if he had ever ceased to be so! Ah, if Trampy . . .! But Lily was married . . . the divorce depended on the husband . . . and the husband wouldn't have it at any price: not for a million, he said, by Jove, would he be separated from a little wife whom he adored!

"Poor Lily!" thought Jimmy, sadly. "Will she always be doomed to drag that dead weight about with her?"

During the intervals for rest, while Lily wiped the perspiration from her forehead, Jimmy talked to her . . . at first, of insignificant things . . . the name "Astrarium," for instance . . . a place devoted to planets, to stars, as a palmarium is to palms. Stars . . . that was to say, bill-toppers: the Three Graces; the Laurences; the Lillians; the Marjuttis; the Lilies . . . yes, the Lilies! Then he pitied her for belonging to Trampy; and what a good little Lily she would have been if she had remained with her family!

"But I *am* a good little Lily!" she said, with a display of childish vehemence. "What more do you want? We artistes do what we jolly well please and we don't care a damn for the rest!" And she had half a mind to tell him

that it was all his fault. "I had to do a silly thing and I did it," she continued, with an expression of regret on her face. "I married without love; but lovers, my! I've had, I may say, as many as I wanted . . . from the son of a lord down."

And Lily, to excite him, told him the long array of her love-affairs, as it was told everywhere, on the Bill and Boom Tour, on the Kellermann, on the Eastern and Western Tours, like the whippings and the rest.

"Yes, I know," replied Jimmy, very coldly.

"What, you don't believe me!" exclaimed Lily. "There were men who would have left wife and child for me! Heaps of lovers, tons of them! . . ."

"My poor Lily, having so many is the same as having none at all!" added Jimmy, dreamily.

But still he did not declare his love: besides, he had not much opportunity, had constantly to leave her, to go and give orders, or climb up on the roof, or look at the heating-apparatus, below.

Lily watched him go, followed him with a sphinx-like glance, while a vague smile flickered about her lips. . . .

Meanwhile, the two assistants replaced the bird in its cage, locked the door, opened that leading to the dressing-room passage, and the artistes arrived and took up their places on their carpets.

Lily had seen it a hundred times, a thousand times, "millions of times!" She never wearied of it. She spent the day there, among the groups of bloomers: the Three Graces, bare-armed, went to work, practised the human cluster; Nunkie kept an eye on his dear nieces and rehearsed the Bambinis, now that old Martello was keeping his room for good. Lily, who was almost reduced to eating dry bread, but who remained the fine lady nevertheless, brought them bags of sweets. Calmed by her work, she sat down in a corner, laughed, her head thrown back,

full-throated, applauded the others with her thumb-nail, shook hands with the new comers, made herself liked by all.

And it was :

“Hullo, girls! Hullo, boys! . . . Dear old Blackpool! . . . What’s the news at the Palace? . . . Who’s topping the bill at the Hippodrome?”

Lily, on her rickety chair, made as it were a little centre at which the news was exchanged. To think that, instead of being there, at the top of the profession, she might have been at some Glasgow twopenny theatre, where ladies are admitted without shoes or stockings, or playing the darky at Earl’s Court! Yes, but for Jimmy, that’s where she would have been! Or else like the Parisienne, in Russia! She, an English girl, my! And Lily fervently touched her lucky charm: oh, work, work, thank goodness for it! And Lily rendered homage to work and sprang from her chair to shake hands with Tom, who had come to see his palace unpacked:

“Good morning, Tom! Welcome!”

This Tom, who now topped the bill everywhere and had a permanent address and his own scenery: wasn’t it wonderful? He was no longer her Pa’s old servant: genius removes all distances; a man is what he makes himself! And they shook hands warmly, like equals.

Lily, as a sensational bill-topper and a friend of Jimmy’s, was always in great request. She talked nicely, without pose of any kind, like a woman who is sure of herself and knows things. The Astrarium . . . the Astrarium . . . what did that mean? They asked Lily:

“It’s like . . . a palmarium,” she explained, “with sunflowers in it, all sorts of things . . . girls . . . stars . . .”

She described her journeys, storms, gee! Weren’t there, Glass-Eye? People who had never been outside

Europe and the States had no idea ! Lily talked of India, Africa, Australia ; talked of lions, who stand on their hind legs when they're angry, and tigers, who lie down flat ; mentioned stage friendships between elephants and camels and herself in the midst of it all, " that high," lowering her hand to six inches from the floor ; talked of animal-training : dogs, cats, sea-lions and " that great, big, wicked Australian rabbit " which boxed like a man. She was a well-informed person, was Lily. And a providence for her family also, to listen to her. When any one brought news of her Pa and the New Trickers, with Daisy as a statue on her pedestal, one of the successes of the year :

" Yes," Lily replied, in a patronizing tone, " I know. It was my idea. I gave it to them."

They thought it very nice of her. She listened with great dignity to what they said about the New Trickers. They would not be at the Astrarium on the opening night. They were finishing an engagement on the Bill and Boom that same evening. They would be in Paris the next day. Mr. Clifton was reckoning on this appearance for the final triumph of his troupe . . . and he deserved it. What a man, Mr. Clifton, what a man ! Not easy to please, eh, Lily ? And the inevitable gesture followed. But Lily would have none of that now, she would not hear her Pa spoken of as a brute ! Did they take her for a performing dog ? One was born with the gift, or else one remained all one's life a Daisy or a fat freak ! She was proud to have a Pa like hers. She wasn't a mountebank picked up on the road ! Lily had a Pa and a Ma : a Ma of her own, a Pa whom she was certain about. She bore a well-known name. She belonged to the " father-and-son " aristocracy of the music-hall. She had never needed " that " to make her practise, she, an artiste, brought up like a lady :



"Wasn't I, Glass-Eye? Tom, wasn't I?"

And the jewellery and the sweets her Pa bought her, my! Tons of it! Of course, he would stand no nonsense about behaviour; and Lily made them all laugh till the tears came about that footy rotter who made love to her in London, before the time when drink made him look so disgusting, and, when she loitered in the street with him, Pa, the moment she reached the door, caught her such a blow that she took all the steps to the basement at one jump and there found her Ma waiting for her . . . gee!

"And they were quite right, too! And . . . do they know that I'm going to top the bill at the Astrarium?" she asked.

"No, they think you're in Spain or somewhere."

"Somewhere!" said Lily to herself, with a thrill at her heart. "I'll show them!"

She choked with joy at the idea of the startled look on the faces of Pa and Ma when they saw her on the aerobike. An exuberant gladness filled her whole being. And that feverish work, those labourers everywhere, the opening in the roof, the terrace up above, those posters all over Paris and there, behind the iron door, in the dark, the bird! It was all for her: a theatre for herself! And she felt a need to leap, to laugh, to spread gaiety all around her; and she rushed about madly with the Bambinis, romped with them behind the pillars, rolled with them on the floor of her dressing-room, became once more the Lily who had played truant all around the world, inventing practical jokes in India and climbing apple-trees in Honolulu. She crossed the combs and tooth-brushes on the Roofer girls' tables, rushed into their room when they were undressed, drove the trembling herd of them distracted, talked of the thousand dangers that awaited them if they didn't mend their ways, made them fly to their lucky charms, to ward

off ill-luck, when she offered them a yellow flower, with great ceremony, or some broken glass in a jewel-box. Then she talked to the Three Graces, those big girls who always astonished her with their cloistered lives—Nunkie before everything—and who amused themselves by measuring one another round the biceps, round the chest, or else, with their elbows on the table, played at who should first bend back the other's wrist. Lily sat down with them, for a moment, then stopped, breathless with larking and talking, and went back to her dressing-room :

"I shall have months to spend in here!" she thought.

And, assisted by Glass-Eye, she pinned up bits of stuff, tied a silk bow to the back of the chair, put up nails for her costumes, laid out on her table long rows of post-cards, photos of friends, all dispersed to the four quarters of the globe, some dead, others done for, all the poor witnesses of her life. Then she took her black golliwog from her trunk and kissed it passionately—"Darling! Darling!! Darling!!!"—before hanging it up on the wall. And along the dressing-room passage and through the window came the sound of voices . . . snatches of homesick tunes : *From Rangoon to Mandalay* or *Way down upon the Swanee River* . . . and, with a "Hullo, Lily! Hullo, old boy!" the female-impersonator walked into her room as though it were his own, sat down on the basket trunk, plunged his green eyes into hers.

And sometimes Jimmy passed, always at a run : something had gone wrong somewhere, the heating-apparatus, the electric light.

"Hullo, Lily!" And he stopped for a moment, frowned at the sight of the impersonator. "Still busy?" he asked, seeing Lily, bare-armed, washing something in her basin.

"Have to be," said Lily. "I always wash my little blouses; we do everything ourselves, don't we, Glass-

Eye? And, when I'm performing, I have two pairs of tights to wash a day."

"Two pairs of tights!"

"Why, of course, *matinée* and evening! You have no idea, Jimmy . . . the nickel . . . when I sit on the handle-bar, it makes a great mark . . . just here, look!"

And she laughed at Jimmy over her shoulder, as she pointed to the place . . . and then blushed, like a frolicsome child who has been found out and is, oh, *so* sorry!

"Every one's got to keep to his own dressing-room!" said Jimmy, feeling very uncomfortable, to the man with the green eyes. "You can't stay here; it's against the rules!"

"We're doing no harm, please, Mr. Jimmy," retorted Lily, sitting down beside the impersonator and slipping her arm around his waist.

"Poor Jimmy!" said the impersonator, when the other had left the room in a rage. "He's jealous, eh, darling?"

"He jealous? Then why doesn't he say so? One can't guess a thing like that! When a man's a man, he speaks out!"

And the architect appeared, in his turn, he, too, running from one end of the theatre to the other. He wore a bandage over one eye:

"Knocked up against a beam . . . a little accident. Have you seen Jimmy?"

"He's over there, I think," replied Lily, without troubling to look at him.

There was no jealousy about the architect. He stayed for a moment, sniffed at the scent-bottle, smiled at the photos on the wall. A green-eyed impersonator, a blue-eyed impersonator: the room could have been full of impersonators, for all he cared. Dark girls, yellow girls, fair girls, so many toys to distract him from his rules and compasses. He was bored at once; turned to another

at once; and it was all so amusing! He was the typical lover of the woman of the stage, with his little surface passions. And very amiable withal, knowing them all and friendly with them, a great purveyor of anecdotes:

"The Para-Paras—you know, Lily—have committed suicide . . . in their bedroom . . . awful poverty. The wife wasn't . . . Tottie enough . . . and the husband was teaching the English accent to continental clowns! . . . Poland? A magnificent engagement in Russia. . . . Old Martello hasn't three days to live. . . . Oh . . . and Nunkie! There's news among the Three Graces! The troupe's done for this time!"

And he told how, last night, poor Thea, while mending her uncle's overcoat, found in the lining an old letter from America . . . from some swain she had had over there . . . a letter glowing with love and regret. Yes, Nunkie knew how to hold his nieces, the architect explained, laughing . . . watched them like a Spanish duenna, confiscated the letters that came for them, if necessary, the old rogue, and calmed their ardours with a few drops of bromide in a glass of water, every evening, on the pretence of keeping them from catching cold in the draughts. Oh, the old rogue! And Thea had almost fainted with grief in her dressing-room when she read the letter.

"Quite a business, Lily! A scandal in their little home! Very funny, eh?" he added, as he ogled Lily's pigeon-eggs and rolled a cigarette.

Lily, who had seen poor Thea cry before and who knew to what extent her lover's treachery had humiliated her, was secretly furious to hear that jossier talk carelessly of things like that: did he imagine, the idiot, that they weren't built like other people, in the profession, that they had no feelings? What need had the public to know about their lives? It was among themselves, quite among themselves, all that!

"Get out of my sight, you damned josser!" said Lily.  
"Go and eat coke!"

But the other, greatly amused, described his latest discovery, a pearl, in an out-of-the-way neighbourhood . . . at Vaugirard Fair . . . an extraordinary girl, showing off on a couple of trestles in front of a canvas booth, in which her man lifted weights to the light of the Argand burners:

"Picture this girl, Lily," said the enthusiastic josser, "picture this girl on her trestles, doing weights, balancings, all sorts of things. A body like a boy's, all muscle, and thin: whew! Not *that* much fat on her: no hips; arms and shoulders like Michael Angelo's flayed model. And I talked to her afterwards. And her man gave me a queer look, you know . . . I got a blow . . ."

"Well done!" cried Lily, clapping her hands. "The beam, eh? That'll teach you to meddle in other people's business! Oh, you don't know those tenters! One of these days you'll be picked up with your face smashed in, or shot through the chest with a revolver."

"I say, though," the architect interrupted, "that girl . . . I don't know how we came to speak of you . . . she knows you, Lily!"

"That's right! Now I have mountebanks among my acquaintances!" said Lily, with an air of disgust. "Get out of this, I say! You wanted Jimmy; there he is, look!"

And Lily, furious, jerked her head towards the passage.

When Lily went home again she did not even think of what she had just heard. The death of the Paras; the Graces . . . Nunkie . . . that old rogue! . . . She forgot all about them. . . . She saw only the one thing: the aerobike, the theatre! Ah, she had it in her blood, in spite of those ugly stories! Even outside, when, upon Jimmy's advice, she went to take the air in the parks, under the great blue sky, she regretted the dark stage, the canvas landscapes

of the back-drops ; the open-air scenery appeared paltry to her beside it. Between her and nature there was always the aerobike ! In a few days . . . was it possible ? She clenched her little hands over an imaginary handle-bar, hardened her pigeon-eggs, made pedalling movements, in spite of herself, on the floor of the tram-car which she very soon took to get back to the theatre again ! It was her life, her joy, her suffering, her good and evil ; it was her field, her very own field, the field which she had sown with sweat that she might reap fame and glory.

And, when she returned, she revelled in that smell of hot glue and tar and scent ; oh, it was much nicer than the country ! And more interesting, too : all the little drama that was being enacted among the Graces, for instance ; Nunkie had lost his wonderful reputation, he was surrounded with less reverence ; the story of the confiscated letters was beginning its round of the world. It was all very well for him to spoil his dear girls, to double his attentions, to treble the doses of bromide ; there was no doubt about it, the troupe's days were numbered. The boy-violinist and others were making love to the Three Graces, fresh troupes were being formed, three more, any number ! And they all talked freely, turned their backs without hesitation upon Nunkie, who was prowling round :

" Well ? " he asked. " What's the mystery ? "

" We were discussing marriage, Nunkie."

" That's right, my children," he replied, with a sigh.

Lily, in all these plots and counter-plots, knew how to remain neutral and to be very nice to everybody ; she had been trained from childhood to keep her opinions to herself ; none of her damned business, all that ; something that might have been foreseen and expected . . . like the death of old Martello, which Jimmy told her of. . . .

Yes, the old man had flickered out in his bed, just like that. . . .

But she needed all her composure, indeed, when Jimmy told her that those dear little Bambinis . . . ah, there was bad news for them, the poor loves !

"What ? What ?" asked Lily.

"Well, we are going to lose them ; they've been claimed by their brother, it seems."

"What !" cried Lily. "Their brother ? The . . . the Mexican one ?"

"Yes, I think so," said Jimmy. "He's come back from South America. He is in Paris now . . . somewhere in a penny show, in the suburbs . . . I don't know where . . . with a girl."

"With a girl !" thought Lily.

Everything returned to her in a flash ! The girl with the bruised skin . . . that boy's body, all muscle . . . Ave Maria ! Ave Maria ! Not dead ! She felt inclined to run up to Trampy, to fly at his throat, to bellow in his face that Ave Maria was here, just to see the effect ! But she restrained herself. Suppose it were not true ? Oh, she would soon know ! That footy rotter, if it were true ! O God, grant that it might be true !

All this passed through her brain in less than a second.

"Why !" said Jimmy, seeing her turn pale. "Does that affect you so much . . . the loss of your little friends the Bambinis ? For you're going to lose them. . . ."

"No, Jimmy !" she replied indignantly. "You shall not give up the Bambinis to their brother, a cruel brute like that, right at the bottom of the profession ! I know . . . I've seen. . . . You shan't do it, Jimmy ; and, look here, I forbid you !"

"Well, Lily, Lily, I'll do what I can, to please you, you know ; I'll try ; I'll see the police ; you must give your evidence, if you have anything to say. Do you know Lily, you're as good as gold ! It's a good little Lily . Hard upon herself and kind to others !"

But he was interrupted . . . Jimmy here, Jimmy there . . . he was wanted . . . for the flies, for the roof. . . . Jimmy flew to the stage, bothered on every side, worried by the Astrarium . . . and Lily. Lily! He could not escape her now, do what he might! He had her in his heart, in his brain; she lived and existed in his chest, shot up there like a flame! Whatever he had been told about her he now no longer knew, did not want to know. And, besides, even if it had been true, oh, he would have forgiven everything! He would have passed over everything! He would have plunged into the abyss to get Lily out of it, whatever she had done; yes, in spite of everything! In spite of everybody! In spite of Trampy, husband or not!



### III

TO-MORROW was to be the great day, the opening of the Astrarium, the first night; and Jimmy, more bustling than ever, forgot Lily . . . almost . . . on that evening, especially, the evening of the dress-rehearsal: not an ordinary rehearsal, with the band-parts handed to the conductor across the footlights—"A march here, please, a waltz there. 'K you"—no, the whole show, with orchestra and all complete; the stage flooded with light; each turn in its own setting: "Corridor," "Wood," "Room," "Palace." Jimmy multiplied himself in the final fever. The theatre, arranged according to his ideas, was still encumbered with ladders and scaffoldings; but gangs of labourers were hard at work on every side. The obstructions all disappeared like magic, were juggled away. Jimmy had made sure that the roof was ready; he had run from the landing-point, out of sight of the audience, through the door contrived in the wall of the stage, crossed the fly-galleries, come down by the pulley-rope; the whole thing, from roof to stage, had taken him, watch in hand, thirty seconds. And Lily had done it also. It formed part of the turn, a sensational addition to the aerobike. All would be ready, all would go well, provided that Lily was not nervous that evening . . . and to-morrow especially! Those confounded crazy little girls! Crazy every one of them: Laurence herself, the bravest of the lot, had just had an awful fall, at Boston, in her excitement at losing her lucky charm. It was the event

in the profession, the accident of the day. Lily might be frightened by it. Now it was essential that she should succeed . . . and succeed at the first attempt. His fortune and hers, his future, the success of the Astrarium depended on it. And Jimmy, obsessed by his labours, had hardly time to think of Trampy in the formidable effort of the eleventh hour. And yet, sometimes, he felt a pain at his heart. That adorable Lily! Would he ever make her love him? And now there was that impersonator! Oh, to work, to work! And he went at it, hammer and tongs, to make sure of the aerobike's success . . . to achieve fame . . . which was as sweet as love! And he was wanted from one end of the theatre to the other. Oh, he might well look upon the Astrarium as his creation! Already, a few days before, rumours of a strike were current. The managers were boycotted by the artistes, in England. Jimmy feared lest the Astrarium should feel the consequences, under the pressure of the Performers' Association, but he had arranged everything, seen each artiste separately, explained his plans: gala matinées, creation of an asylum, a home of rest . . . a glory to help in such a task . . . who could tell but that they were working for themselves by adding their stone to the edifice? He quoted the Para-Paras and their wretched end; old Martello, dead without leaving a penny; the Bambinis, homeless; Ave Maria, unprotected. The men listened, with serious faces. As for the girls, his words came straight from the heart. Those decent girls, who earned their living as they knew how and the living of others besides, they understood him at once; and Lily no longer laughed; on the contrary:

"Me? Whatever you like! For nothing, if you like; rely on me, Jimmy!"

And now the hour had come; they were to appear under the critical eye of Kellermann. The acting-manager

had arrived from England, that same day, with the stage-manager, who was "behind." It made a strange impression, that huge red-and-gold house, glittering with light and sounding curiously empty to the thunder of the band. Everybody was at his post: the tall flunkeys stood motionless at the entrance-doors, in the promenades, as if the audience had been there, whereas there was practically nobody except Kellermann and the manager. And on the stage, which had been cleared of every superfluous piece of property, splendid order reigned: the scene-shifters, up above, had their hands on the windlasses; the two electricians, on their perches, turned the limelight where it was to shine; the drops rose and fell without a hitch; the scenes slipped into their places, shifted, in the English fashion, by one man. For each turn on the stage, the next was ready to come on, no more; all the rest were in the dressing-rooms. But there, behind the iron curtain, one could picture staircases crowded with people running up and down, passages full of light, a flurried ant-hill, and feel that a ring of bells would be enough to bring tumbling on to the stage a whole glittering, grotesque or radiant world of people, from the monkey-faced sketch-comedian to Lily, in her pink tights, an image of Venus. There was electricity in the air of that empty house, in which all felt the presence of the powerful master, harder to please than a crowd. And rays of light ran along the stage, the back-drop seemed a cloud ready to split in the crash of the thunder, under the storm of the raging brasses. On the stage, the turns defiled in their order, under the shimmering lights: the Bambinis, brother and sister, lissom grace and strength combined, filled the huge space with the free play of their rosy bodies and the brightness of their genuine gaiety. The Three Graces formed the human cluster, a hanging group of faces, figures, and glorious lines. The programme poured

out laughter, harmony, beauty, till, against the blue forest, came the scarlet step-dances of the Roofers. And then silence: the feature of the evening, the aerobike! There was a moment's anxiety. A net was stretched above the stalls, from the footlights to the opening in the roof. For the audience, at any rate, all danger was removed, even in case of a fall. Then the glass dome above opened; and the curtain rose on the Elysian glimmer of a scene studded with stars; and everything was empty, stage and auditorium. The distance seemed immense: "miles and miles!" The machine was to start out suddenly, rush through space, disappear up above, like a meteor that shoots out from infinity and returns to it.

A few seconds passed, during which Jimmy gave Lily her last instructions:

"You're not afraid, Lily? Would you like me to do it?"

Afraid! She turned her calm face to him. Oh, she could have accomplished impossible and cruel things, braved torture, walked on burning coals! She felt herself made of supple steel, unerring and exact:

"Up, quick, quick! Ready, Jimmy?"

"Ready!"

"Then . . . GO!"

The aerobike flashed like an arrow from the bow, raised itself with a magnificent jerk; the propeller hummed like a thunderbolt, the wings rustled in flight, pointed toward the opening, went up . . . up . . . up . . . disappeared in the star-strewn sky. It was done! The band struck up the triumphal march, Kellermann, the manager, the few who were present all burst into cheers; and, suddenly, over the house plunged in darkness, from the back of the stage, came a burst of light. Lily, after running over the roof and sliding down the pulley, was descending against the blue back-drop, bringing with her the star!

First, one saw the light breaking, then swelling and increasing in brilliancy; and Lily appeared, a starry Eve, holding, in her upraised hand, a dazzling luminary, a crystal globe, which an invisible wire from behind filled with an intensity of light. And powerful rays, end-of-the-world coruscations, shot to every side, above the crater of the orchestra.

"Splendid!" cried Kellermann. "That dishes the waterspouts at the Hippodrome, the avalanches, everything!" And, as Jimmy came up, "Good boy, Jimmy!" he said, catching him a great smack on the shoulder by way of a compliment. "And your girl . . . your . . . Maggy . . . your . . . what's her name? Lily . . . glorious! Very good indeed! Couldn't be better! Capital idea!"

He gave a quick glance at his watch, a few words to Jimmy, to the manager, over his shoulder, on the wing:

"All the boxes booked three weeks ahead? All the stalls? That's right! Good-bye! Good luck!"

Already his broad back was disappearing through the door; had to catch the midnight train for Cologne; presence indispensable.

"Telephone to-morrow; let me know how things go. Ta-ta!"

And Kellermann was far away.

And Lily? Lily was in her dressing-room, stupefied with delight. How soon it was done! How simple it was! Jimmy, after all, with his scrawls and his scribbles, with his brain-work: what a discovery he had made! She would have liked it to last for ever, the flight on the aerobike; she still seemed to be rushing up to the stars, to feel the coolness of the night on her face. How funny it was, going up, up, up and out through that hole. She was still laughing at it, with little convulsive movements of the shoulders, and stammering out things.

When she was dressed, she received Jimmy's congratulations and everybody's. They gave her a bouquet :

"To our little favourite!"

She answered, without knowing what she said; went home. Everything seemed to be turning round and round. She ate a few mouthfuls, washed down with a glass of milk; and then, suddenly, made a rush for Glass-Eye! A pillow-fight followed:

"Here, take that! . . . Take that! . . . And that! . . . And that!"

Ten minutes of an epic struggle, on the bed thrown into confusion and disorder, as after a murder; huge slaps on the firm, rounded forms; virile smackings; and Glass-Eye, breathlessly, had to own herself beaten, to beg for mercy.

"That'll teach them!" cried Lily, falling on the bed, panting, drunk with joy, drunk with joy!

Trampy, Mexico, Ma's insults, the jealousies, the grudges, Daisy, the fat freaks: pooh, none of that existed for her! Nothing remained but herself, drunk with an immense joy! She was almost delirious, in the excess of her happiness:

"I'll smash up their damned troupes, do you hear, Glass-Eye? There! Like that!" And she tried to renew the fight, but her strength failed her. "Dished and done for, their damned troupes!"

And she laughed, she burst with laughing, when she thought of their eighteen feet of stage:

"Stages as big as my hand, Glass-Eye, is what they've got to turn in!"

Whereas she went straight up in the air, up to the stars, miles high, up above everything! Bang! A smack for Glass-Eye, who was just taking off her skirt.

"And I say, Glass-Eye, Ma . . . who said that I . . . you know what she said! But wait till they see me in my

grand dresses ! I'll order them to-morrow ; and my hats too. And I'll invite Pa and Ma to the hotel ! And we'll drink champagne and I'll have fifty francs' worth of flowers on the table, just to show them ! ' Our Lily,' that's what I'm going to be, ' our own Lily,' damn it ! ”

Lily, when she was in bed, turned things over and over in her brain. Yes, her Pa was quite right. It was for her good, for her own good. Big salaries, which would be all hers ! And no more performing-dog toques, but big hats and feathers and motor-cars and furs ; but no goggles ! No, she must find something that wouldn't hide her face, so that people would recognize her and say :

“ That's Lily ! ”

And the road behind her motor would be strewn with the bodies of pros who had died of jealousy ! And she would consult Pa and Ma about the colour of her liveries, about her crest : a wheel, with wings to it ! And Lily dropped off into a sleep interrupted by awful nightmares, in which Ma was dead—poor Ma !—before witnessing her triumph ; in which elephants trumpeted in her honour and sea-lions applauded her with their finny fore-paws, all along a queer sort of Tottenham Court Road, paved with fat freaks, at the end of which a Horse Shoe, as big as the Marble Arch, opened out upon the stars.

Poor Glass-Eye, on her side, had the most outlandish dreams. Her brain was turned, from living in the midst of all that. She dreamt that she was flying, too ; that she was Lily in her turn ; that she was soaring over White-chapel ; but, from time to time, a nervous kick from Lily recalled her to the realities of life.

“ Glass-Eye ! There's a knock at the door, I think. Or else I'm dreaming. What's the time ? Ten o'clock ! Get up, Glass-Eye ! If it's the landlady, tell her I'll pay her next week.”

But Glass-Eye, who had gone to the door, shut it suddenly and came back to Lily, looking quite startled :

"Miss Lily, there's some one, all in black, on the stairs ; a ghost !"

"If you're trying to frighten me," cried Lily, jumping out of bed, "I'll knock your other eye out ! Take care !"

She was choking with excitement. Lily was afraid of nothing. But those confounded ghosts : poor Ma, perhaps ! And she quickly separated two fingers wide behind her back, so as to be on the safe side and ward off ill-luck :

"Come with me, Glass-Eye ; you go first !"

And Lily, in her night-dress, half-opened the door, looked out.

A thin woman, all in black, stood motionless. It was not Ma. Lily breathed more freely :

"What do you want ?" she asked.

"I want to speak to Miss Lily," said the woman in black. "I went to the theatre and they gave me your address. I came. . . . I suppose you don't remember me, it's so long ago. . . . Ave Maria, on the wire, in Mexico ?"

"Ave Maria ! Come in," said Lily.

Ave Maria, whom she had sought for so long. She would know at last ! Oh, if it were true ! God grant that it might be true ! Lily, hardly recovered from her fright, quivered at the thought and devoured Ave Maria with her eyes. She recognized her, now that she knew : it was she indeed, but grown old before her time, looking wretched, thin, hollow-eyed, a face all skin and bone. And the two stood contemplating each other in silence.

"How pretty you've grown !" whispered Ave Maria, timidly. "No one would take you for a professional."

But a sudden fit of coughing brought scarlet patches to her pale cheeks.

"It catches me here," she said, pressing her hand to



her chest. "It's damp, sometimes, in the tent. And then half-naked on those trestles. The work warms one, it's true. The other night I saw some one who knew you, a gentleman. I should have liked to ask him more, but my brother struck him in the face. I got my turn after. However, I wanted to see you. I went to the Astrarium. I asked them."

"Go on," said Lily, who was burning to know, but did not want to show it. "Glass-Eye, give me my dressing-gown. Go on, please!"

"I don't know that I dare," said Ave Maria, "now that I have seen you. You are so much better-looking than I am. Are you still living with him?" she asked, in a low voice, fixing two fiery eyes on Lily.

"No," said Lily, "I am living with nobody!"

"But they told me. I heard at Buenos Ayres . . . the story of the whippings, your running away with him . . ."

"What whippings? And I'm living with nobody!" retorted Lily, very haughtily.

"But you have lived with him . . . in Germany . . . Trampy, you know."

"No," said Lily. "I was married, wasn't I, Glass-Eye?"

"But *I'm* married to him!" Ave Maria broke in, more aggressively than before.

"Oh, if it were true!" thought Lily. "Oh, if it were true!"

She dared not believe it, it would have been too beautiful, beautiful beyond dreams. And, with her nerves stretching to breaking-point:

"Prove it!" she said, coldly, to Ave Maria.

"Yes, I have my proofs," replied Ave Maria, shaken with a furious cough. "And I'll show them! Trampy belongs to me, not to you! He's in Paris, they tell me. . . ."

And I mean to have him, do you hear? I've suffered enough and to spare. I've done everything since he left me. Look here, at Caracas, people used to offer me two-pence to let them black my eye, sometimes, when my brother was locked up at the police-station. And there were the one-horse circuses where we slept in a heap on the straw, in Chili or some such country. And, sometimes, I lost my balance on the wire, because of my cough. And my brother: you know him! And the cattle-men, when they're drunk! One of them stabbed me here, with a knife, there, here, in the breast; they had to cut it off—the breast—later, at Montevideo, because of the gangrene. Yes, he stabbed me with a knife, because I wouldn't say, 'I love you,' to him! Fancy saying, 'I love you,' to any one but Trampy! Never! I would have let them jump on my chest with their hobnailed boots first! And, now that Trampy's here, I want him! He belongs to me and I mean to have him."

"Well, take him, if he belongs to you!" said Lily. "I don't care a hang for your Trampy; I've turned him out long ago!"

"So . . . it's true? If he's no longer with you, I can have him again. I shall have him! I'll have my brother locked up, if necessary, to be free! I have only to say a word . . . Not because of the story of the man whose nose he bit off at Rio: no, the other day, at Vaugirard, he used the knife. I'll tell everything, to have my Trampy back."

And her rough voice became gentle now, in her Anglo-Italian jargon, with a dash of Spanish in it; everything became clear, everything yielded before the violence of that fierce love. Lily was astounded to hear it:

"That's what I call love!" she thought. "I had no idea, my! And all for Trampy! It's worse than in the novels."

And she was touched, in spite of herself, and, when

Ave Maria cried, "Oh, how happy you must be, if he loves you!" Lily dared not protest that she didn't care a hang for that soaker, lest she should hurt the poor martyr. She replied, on the contrary, that Trampy was very nice, but that he was hers no longer, that he belonged to Ave Maria, since Ave Maria had the proofs . . . *if* she had the proofs. . . .

"I have them here, Miss Lily, my marriage-lines. I was able to get them, after he went. I had the certificate witnessed. My brother, when he came to fetch me, never knew about it. I sewed it in the lining of a portmanteau; no chance of losing it: here it is."

And she produced a yellow document from her bodice and laid it on the table.

Lily pounced upon it . . . read it at a glance . . . it was quite regular! Oh, the footy rotter! Two wives! To say nothing of his thirty-six girls! And what a fine trick she would play him! At last, she was about to get rid of her festering sore! She could not breathe for happiness. And, as Ave Maria was watching her movements, for fear of her keeping the paper, Lily handed it back to her, certain that it was in good hands, that it would not be lost.

Then and there an idea came to her. Trampy would be at the theatre, that afternoon, with Tom, who, knowing little about all these stories, interested only in the condition of those biceps of his, had taken Trampy as his assistant and had told Lily so. And Lily had said nothing, reserving to herself the right to have him turned off the stage by Jimmy, with a smack in the eye, before everybody: the footy rotter, coming there to defy her! Well, there would be no smack in the eye; she would simply hand him over to Ave Maria, as one flings a lump of carrion to a tigress!

"Wait a bit, you faithful husband!" she growled. "You'll see, presently!"

And, first of all, when Ave Maria rose to go, Lily forbade her to do anything of the kind, dreading lest the brother, who must be looking out for her, might drag her back to the booth at the fair and then take the first train to some other place, after getting hold of the Bambinis. And Lily meant none of all this to take place; she would rather go to the police and have the brute arrested!

"Stay here, Ave Maria," she said. "I'll give you back your Trampy this afternoon."

Oh, if she had been alone, how she would have flown at Glass-Eye, to work off her superabundant joy! It would have been a merciless fight, with slaps in the Mexican style! But a lady receiving her friends must set a good example. She contented herself with hustling Glass-Eye by word and gesture:

"My new dress! My big hat!"

Ave Maria, quite taken up with the excitement of seeing Trampy again, of having him back again, left herself in Lily's hands. She felt as if she were looking at a princess, when Lily made Glass-Eye spin round the room. She could not even help smiling, when she saw Glass-Eye catch her foot in the dresses spread out on the floor, so that Lily asked her angrily if she meant to go on hopping about like that for ever, if she really wanted to have a candle lit in her glass eye to make her see that bodice, there, right in front of her nose, damn it! And Glass-Eye's fright, when she heard that . . . though Glass-Eye was never surprised at anything that Miss Lily said or did!

Going to the Astrarium, Lily, followed by Glass-Eye, walked along the street, with her cheeky feather waving like a flag in battle. Ave Maria, by her side, kept close to the wall, with timid glances to right and left. Lily did not call her attention to the Astrarium posters, for fear of humiliating her: she would have had to explain that she was topping the bill and poor Ave Maria, who was

starring at the fair, would never have understood. A professional abyss separated the two of them. Lily saw this and had too kind a heart to let the other feel it. What a difference between them ! Merely in the way in which Lily entered the theatre and smiled to the stage-doorkeeper ! Ave Maria followed very timidly, like a beggar-woman stealing into a palace. She felt out of her element in those big theatres, where she had not appeared for ever so long, having come down to the level of one-horse circuses, patched canvas tents, acrobatic performances in the open air on the slack-wire stretched from tree to tree. Lily looked a princess beside her, really. Ave Maria was even surprised to see her address a gentleman who was there : it was the architect, with a bandage over his eye. Ave Maria recognized him ; and he, rendered prudent by the blow which he had received from " her man," stepped back instinctively at the sight of her. But Lily caught him by the lapel of his coat :

" You've been fooling me . . . with your measurements," she said, " and there are certain things that jossers oughtn't to meddle with ; and it serves you right, that black eye of yours ; but I forgive you, because of the immense service you're doing me . . . without knowing it . . . you lover of second-rate goods ! " she muttered, as she watched him slink off, taking her forgiveness with him.

The stage was almost empty. Tom had come, not Trampy ; so much the better, there would be all the more there presently, for the great scene !

" Wait for me a minute," she said to Ave Maria. " Sit down over there, in the corner."

And Lily went up to her dressing-room ; she wanted to look her best, to heighten her attractions . . . a little red on her lips, a little blue on her eyelids . . . to make Trampy regret the more what he was going to lose. And, when she was ready, Jimmy passed and, icicle though he

was, could not help paying her a compliment on her good looks. He appeared quite disconcerted :

"Just imagine, Lily. What do you think happened to me, in the impersonator's dressing-room? I had something to say to him . . . I walk in . . . see the impersonator half undressed . . . and it's a woman, Lily, a magnificent woman! You never told me, you kiddie!"

"Hush!" said Lily. "Don't give her away; it's a secret, it's her living, Jimmy."

"Don't be afraid, Lily, I won't prevent any one from earning her living, as long as she does all right on the stage. But I don't know where I am now. That woman who came in with you, for instance," continued Jimmy, jestingly, "she looks just like a man; there's no knowing; nothing would surprise me after that!"

"She's a woman, Jimmy, a married woman! You'll see, presently. We'll have a good laugh; mind you're there! I want everybody to be there! It's a surprise, Jimmy!"

What a kiddie she was, thought Jimmy, as he went down the stairs. The architect, the impersonator: the two scandals of her life. That impersonator whom she kissed in front of him, a story that had gone round the world; Lily's love-affairs, one more ready to leave wife and children for her sake: the exaggeration of the stage, always; mere professional boasting. Like the story of the whippings, like those girls whom she had described to him, like herself, with, all over her skin—"Here, there, damn it!"—wounds that you could put your finger into. Or like those who were said to be done for, or burnt alive, or drowned in shipwrecks, with waves miles high, all for the honour of the profession; when, perhaps, it was simply as good a way as another of retiring from the stage, to get married, with a flourish of trumpets! It wasn't true, all that, or their parade of vice either: all humbug, from end to end, their

amorous conquests, their orgies, their escapades; like their ostrich-feathers, "that long," or their sham diamonds, "that big," and bouquets large enough to fill a cab. But they were decent-hearted girls, all the same: that Lily, what a kiddie, thought Jimmy, feeling quite comforted, quite glad on her account.

And, just then, as luck would have it, he met Tom, to whom Glass-Eye had brought Miss Lily's album, with a request for his autograph. Tom, whose formidable muscles were hardly capable of wielding a pen, especially to write "thoughts," was holding the album with a sheepish look, turning it round and round:

"I say," he said, as Jimmy passed, "write something for me!"

"All right!" said Jimmy.

And he lightly turned the pages of the album, the famous album said to be crammed with passionate declarations. Not a bit of it! Nothing but foolery and childish nonsense:

"May joy and pleasure be your lot  
 . . . . . trot, trot, trot!"

" . . . Regard me as a link.  
 "LOVING PAL."

"*Un afetuoso saludo y un augurio de feliz viaje le desea Pedro y Paolo.*"

"Hoping we shall meet again, if not here, there.  
 "JOE BROOKS."

"*Puedo decir que nunca he visto yo . . . tan cuida y bella . . .*"

There was page upon page, in this style, with, here and there, a rough sketch: a heart pierced by an arrow, signed, "Castaigne;" a dried shamrock: "Blarney Castle;" a bit of seaweed: "Dundee." Jimmy smiled to himself and

especially at what he heard beside him, where Glass-Eye, gazing wide-eyed at Tom's huge arms, was telling him of all her troubles : quite mad, Miss Lily, ought to be locked up ! And *she* ought to know : never left Miss Lily's side since she was travelling by herself, slept with her every night.

" You're a lucky one, you are ! " Tom broke in.

" I should like to see you try it, just ! " Glass-Eye retorted. " And, all the time, I get more smacks than half-pence. Oh, I know she'll pay me in a lump, when she gets it ! She's really very generous. And her Pa and Ma . . . yes . . . do you know what she means to do ? She's not angry with them any longer. She's going to stuff them with turkey and pudding at the hotel and stand them fifty francs' worth of flowers. She's forgiven them ! "

" That's more than I have ! " replied Tom. " Her Pa will know what I am made of to-morrow, the brute ! He'll have one on the mug, for boxing my ears and kicking me out . . . you know . . . because of the letters from Trampy. "

" If you do that, Tom, you'll have Miss Lily to reckon with. What ! You're laughing ! " cried Glass-Eye, angrily. " You don't know how it hurts . . . on one's bones. And those pillow-fights : I've had my nose smashed in one of them before now. Nothing surprises me that Miss Lily says or does. Why, this very morning, she wanted to put a lighted candle in my glass eye ! "

" Eh, what ? A light in your eye ? " exclaimed Tom, suddenly. " I wonder if one really could . . . I say, Jimmy, could one ? "

" Yes, " said Jimmy, greatly amused, " with an invisible wire under the dress. . . . "

" Hurrah ! " cried Tom. " Would you like two shillings a day, Glass-Eye ? And your food and your clothes ? You shall travel with me ; you shall appear on the stage. Come along to the café : we'll sign the engagement ! "



"But what will Miss Lily say?" objected Glass-Eye, trembling at the idea of announcing her departure to her terrible mistress.

"Well," said Tom, "I'll be nice to her Pa, if she's nice to you. Come along!"

"But I don't know how to sign my name."

"You can make your mark, before two witnesses. Come along!"

Glass-Eye, dazzled and beglamoured, followed Tom. She, an artiste! On the stage! At last! Going round the world with Tom . . . living with him . . . married . . . almost!

"That's come in the nick of time!" said Jimmy, as he watched her go off the stage. "Lily, perhaps . . . in her new position . . . will want a real maid, not a Glass-Eye! Lily . . . why, she's perfection! To think of the abysses she has walked along without falling! There's more merit than one thinks in that kind of life. And how I should like to get hold of the people who talk ill of her. And that . . . that . . . oh, that one!"

And Jimmy clenched his fists, at the thought of Trampy, and his heart burst forth: all his patient, brave, manly heart, now well-nigh exhausted.

#### IV

POOR Ave Maria, indifferent to what was going on before her, was still waiting on the stage. For that matter, it was but a few minutes since Lily brought her there. Ave Maria felt inclined to go and meet Trampy on the pavement, to throw her arms round his neck as soon as he appeared. But Lily had earnestly recommended her not to move, whatever happened. So she remained in her corner and, under the pale light, with her back to the "Forest" scene, in the shadow, Ave Maria, looked like a lurking she-wolf, ready to leap out at any moment.

As for Lily, she tripped down the stairs to the stage, contemplating all those bill-toppers at her feet, so to speak. But she took the last stairs at a bound : Trampy had just entered ! Ave Maria, in her corner, behind the pillars and the confused heap of scenery, could not see him. Lily preferred that. She would manage everything in her own way and get rid of him once and for all, get rid of that footy rotter who had come there to jeer at her. He stepped along, with his hat on one side and a dead cigar between his teeth. Trampy, broken, diseased, done for, was jubilant nevertheless ; turned his broad smile from girl to girl ; winked his eye gaily at the Roofers, who drew back in disgust ; and, with outstretched hand :

"How d'you do, Lily ? How's my dear little wife ?"

He enjoyed the humiliation which he was inflicting upon her, would have liked his clothes to be still shabbier, his shoes more down at heel, so that he might thoroughly

disgrace his dear little wife, that great bill-topper, who was leaving the pink of husbands in such a state of destitution. And he threw out his chest, increased his familiarities and even pretended to kiss her, pushed his blotched and pimpled mug close to that charming face. Jimmy gave a bound: Trampy! On the stage! Lily's tormentor! Jimmy, pale with fury, walked up to him, stiff-armed, ready to break the jaw of that thief in the night and chuck him into the street, without more words! But Lily stopped him with a quick gesture:

"Why, Jimmy," she said, "would you keep a man from earning his living? Do you find fault with a husband for loving his little wife? I am your little wife, am I not?" she continued, tantalizing Trampy with her peach-like cheek, tickling his nose with her fair curls. "Don't you deserve a dear little wife?"

"Why, of course I do!" Trampy agreed, surprised, all the same, at this loving reception from his dear little wife.

"There!" cried Lily, unable to restrain herself any longer and giving him a box on the ears. "That'll teach you to call me your little wife, you damned tramp-cyclist! I've never been your little wife. I'll show you your little wife, the real one. Come along, Ave Maria! Here's Trampy!"

"Eh, what?" said Trampy, turning colour. "Ave Maria? I don't know any Ave Maria."

But already Ave Maria was upon him, pressing him in her arms: her Trampy! And her cough brought pink-red patches to her hectic cheeks.

"What's this mean? I don't know you," he stammered, gazing horror-stricken at this old, lean woman, who was taking possession of him before everybody, taking possession of him, Trampy, who cared only for plump little things, sultan that he was. "I don't know her! I don't know her!"

"Here!" cried Lily, snatching the paper from Ave Maria's bodice. "Do you know that? Can you read? Now will you deny that she's your wife . . . your wife . . . your wife?" she repeated, rejoicing in being able to hurl the word at Trampy, who turned pale with fright.

"We'll try and arrange it," whispered Jimmy, still hardly recovered from his surprise. "A divorce in Lily's favour first. She'll dictate your answers for you; you've only got to say yes to everything. And then you can be off somewhere; to West Australia. I'll pay your expenses. And don't you ever dare to show your face again! Never! Do you understand?"

"And that'll teach you to make little of people!" cried Lily. "Let's drink to the health of Trampy, the faithful husband! I'll stand champagne all round. To the health of good old Trampy and his dear little wife!"

But, without waiting for the champagne, already Ave Maria was dragging Trampy to the door and the Roofer girls gave him a triumphal exit. They sent him to Halifax, they sent him to Coventry. They flourished things at his head, amid an uproar of jolly hootings, and took aim at him—"Ping! Ping!"—and pinched him, as the Merry Wives pinched Falstaff in Windsor Forest. And they slipped off their shoes in honour of his wedding, by Jove! And Trampy fled under a shower of boots and slippers, fled like mad, as though the devil were after him.

Jimmy did not know if he was on his head or his heels for joy:

"I'll stand the champagne!" he said. "To Miss Lily's health!"

So much had happened in those few minutes: Lily free again . . . and no scandal . . . the divorce assured . . . Trampy admitting his misdeeds, inventing them, if necessary, confessing anything they asked him to, as long as they did not mention bigamy. . . . Jimmy, had it been

possible, would have offered a general picnic to the whole company. He, usually so calm, felt inclined to sing, to laugh. Never would he have dared to hope. . . . And it had all come so simply, like the things that are bound to happen. Lily was free!

"Bring the bottles up here," he said to the call-boy, "and biscuits and cakes. We'll have it here. We'll christen the stage, as if we were launching a ship . . . in champagne, here, by ourselves, among ourselves! Here's to the stage-manager! Here's to all of us!"

Lily, happy as happy could be, shook everybody by the hand, distributed a "'K you" here and a "'K you" there. She would have liked to have Glass-Eye by her side, to keep her in countenance, open her bag, give her her handkerchief . . . liked to be a little lady who can't do without her maid. . . . But, damn it, where was Glass-Eye? And Lily clenched her fist when she saw her return with cakes in her hands, escorted by Tom, who helped to carry the champagne:

"Where have you been, Glass-Eye?" asked Lily, severely. "What have you been doing with Tom? Give me my handkerchief, Glass-Eye."

"Here's your bag, Miss Lily," said Glass-Eye, excitedly. "I'm going to leave you, Miss Lily."

"What for?" said Lily, feeling vexed. "Because I owe you a trifle?"

"Oh no, not that! I'm going to be a star, too; on my hands: Demon Maud, the lady with the flaming eye; a candle in my glass eye . . . before two witnesses . . . I made my mark at the bottom."

"She's drunk!" cried Lily, utterly dumbfounded. "Or else she's going mad. Jimmy! Tom! Glass-Eye's going mad!"

But, when Tom had explained, Lily approved. Glass-Eye wasn't stupid, really; very intelligent, though you'd

never think it. Glad to see her engaged. . . . And she shook her by the hand, like an old friend and comrade, glad to hear of the success of others . . . among artistes. . . .

And, suddenly, with head thrown back, full-throated, her feather nodding hysterically on her head, Lily laughed . . . laughed . . . laughed. . . .

Maud an artiste! On her hands! A candle in her eye! One fat freak the more on the stage! Gee, they must drink to Glass-Eye's health: Glass-Eye, the bill-topper!

They were all laughing now, filling their glasses at a little table in the middle of the stage, eating cakes, amusing themselves with the corks, which went pop, like toy guns, and applauding with their thumb-nails. To the Astrarium! And long live jollity! That night, they would one and all risk their skins. They were like soldiers drinking to their sweethearts, in the trenches, before the battle. And everything promised well; already a legend was forming among the painted faces: the booking office besieged; ladies and gentlemen in motors; motors in a row, miles and miles of motors; the street bursting with people who had come to book seats! And champagne on the stage, cakes, my, for the asking! An orgy which would start its trip around the world to-morrow, with those few bottles transformed into a Niagara of champagne, enough to flood every green-room from the Klondike to Calcutta! They all enjoyed themselves and let themselves go. And the Roofers, who worshipped Lily, in spite of her abominable tricks, raised their glasses to her health, crowded round her, smiled merrily at her with their white teeth, congratulated her for sending that footy rotter packing:

"Here's to Miss Lily! And a round on the thumb-nail in honour of Miss Lily!"

This christening of the Astrarium was turning into a triumph for her; and there was the evening to come . . .

the evening ! It made her forget Trampy, Jimmy, Glass-Eye, everybody. And . . . the next day . . . her Pa, her Ma, the New Trickers would be at her feet ! Oh, she would give ten years of her life if to-morrow could be there now !

And the evening came. Lily did not leave the theatre. She walked nervously from her dressing-room to the stage, inspected the final operations, interested herself in everything, stopped the boy-violinist, who was crossing the stage with the other members of the band, congratulated him on his approaching marriage with one of the Graces. She talked to the artistes going up to their dressing-rooms, bestowed a smile upon Jimmy, another on the stage-manager, joked with the limelight men working their apparatus on either side of the stage. The footlights lit up with a row of flames, the storm approached. There was a ringing of electric bells—"Ting ! Ting ! Ting !"—as in the machine-room of a ship before the tempest ; the orchestra roared ; and, as though at a thunder-clap, the velvet curtain split asunder : Patti-Patty was revealed on the stage, while the band played as if possessed. Lily, in the shadow of the wings, put her hand to her heart ; her veins were ablaze. And that audience, at which she peeped through a crack in the scenery ; that audience was hers, with its rustling silks, its bare shoulders, its diamonds, its flowers ! She would have liked to step forward, to say :

"Here I am !"

She felt herself excited by a curious feeling ; an aggressive mood, which, no doubt, came from all the healths she had drunk : to the Astrarium, to this one, to that one, to all of us ! Gee, what fun it had been : champagne, cakes, my, tons of cakes ! And Lily, who had long been unused to any such excess, felt her head splitting. A fever seemed also to reign all over the dressing-rooms and passages.

They talked of front boxes reserved at a thousand francs by the Aero Club ; stalls at fifty francs ; every seat in the house filled ; and the best people, nothing but the best ! Lily, in her exalted condition, took it that they had all come for her ; and she had to dazzle them all ! And soar above them all ! To a hurricane of applause from " her favourite audience," the Astrarium audience, on a first night !

And she felt so gay that she was not angry when Glass-Eye asked her, now that *she* was an artiste too, to teach her her stage-smile :

" Why, of course, Glass-Eye ! I owe you that, to say nothing of the rest ! But you won't lose by waiting ! Take my word for it : among friends, you know ! . . . "

And she kissed her maid, felt inclined to cry, became quite sentimental at her going. . . .

She was less amiable to Nunkie, who was prowling around near her. Oh, how angry she felt with that old rogue ! Because of Thea, first of all ; and then it was he who gave her away, not Jimmy ! Tom had told her. Nunkie mumbled something to her : his dear girls ; ungrateful creatures who were leaving him ! His poor life shattered ! His pigeons, he had his pigeons left, yes, and his home ; but what was that compared with loving hearts ? And, as she was on such good terms with Jimmy and everybody, couldn't she use her influence ? Oh, if he could have the Bambinis, if he could be appointed their guardian ! He would bring together such a nice little family troupe : all the joys of home !

" You old wretch ! " cried Lily, in a threatening voice. " Just go and look, at the corner of Oxford Street and Newman Street, if you can see me there ! You old snaky ! You old bromide-merchant ! Hiding letters, too, you nigger-driving humbug ! Oh, you're sure to get the Bambinis, I *don't* think ! "



"*Ver-r-rdammt!*"

Nunkie turned on his heel, shaking the passage with tremendous oaths.

"I thought," Lily shot at him from behind, sarcastically, "I thought one ought never to swear! It's not right to swear, Mr. Fuchs!"

In her dressing-room, she went on laughing at Nunkie and his "*Donner-r-r-wetter-r-r!*" and his "*S-s-satan! S-s-satan!*" It made her comb her hair all awry and apply the grease-paint to her cheeks with a trembling hand. She felt a buzzing in her head: that confounded music, which seemed to come from everywhere and kept hissing in her ears! But, when her turn came, she'd show them! Never had she felt so light. She was sure of herself, strangely sure. It seemed to her that, if need be, she'd have shot up to the stars, damn it!

As soon as she was ready, she went down to the stage. She didn't know why. It was her wish to be everywhere, her craving for movement. The aerobike had been taken from its cage, behind the back-drop; the stage-manager, Jimmy and Jimmy's assistants were standing round it. Jimmy was testing everything, for the last time, making sure that there would be no hitch:

"Hullo, Lily!" he said, when he saw her. "Are you ready?"

"Ready?" said Lily. "Look!"

And she flung back her wrap with her two bare arms and stood, a figure all charm and grace, with youth, joy and courage sparkling in her eyes. In the mysterious half-light, amid the endless sounds from the band, Lily seemed to shed rays. Jimmy, dazzled, looked at that dainty form, that delicate breast, those rounded shoulders, that splendid body fashioned by years of Spartan life, each muscle of which was quivering with enthusiasm. And she laughed . . . laughed . . . told the story of

Nunkie, with furious gestures, as though she were strangling the old beast. And then came sudden displays of feeling, for the Three Graces and the Bambinis. . . .

Jimmy had never seen her like that. The stage-manager also thought her queer, for he looked at Jimmy as though to ask what on earth was the matter with her. And, going up to him, he said :

"Look how she's trembling. One would think she had a fever."

"It's quite true," said Jimmy.

And the two stared at each other in consternation when Lily, stooping to pick up her cloak, was nearly losing her balance and coming to the ground. They exchanged a few words in a whisper. Then the stage-manager said :

"Go up to your dressing-room, Miss Lily. You mustn't stay here, you know. We'll send for you when the time comes. Go and put your hair straight."

It was only a pretext ; but the same thought had passed through both their minds : it was the champagne ! Lily, who was accustomed to drink nothing but water, was . . . if not exactly drunk . . . well . . .

Thereupon, in an instant, Jimmy made up his mind : it was finished and settled, irrevocably, as though he had spent hours in reflecting. The newspapers had expressed doubts ; there had been suggestions of trickery. An immediate, brilliant success was essential, to carry the thing off : a hitch and all was lost and the luck of the Astrarium and his own fame vanished in smoke ! Lily was out of the question that night : she was bubbling over at every pore with unnatural excitement . . . she was not Lily, was not herself : it meant certain death to her, the aerobike smashed to pieces, the end of all things ! Lily would do it to-morrow, the next night ; but not to-night.

He had just time to go to his dressing-room and put

on his white sweater, black breeches, black stockings : an athletic costume which he always kept at the theatre in case of need. And quick, in the saddle : the moment had come ! He must succeed, now or never ! And Jimmy, calm and sure of himself, took his seat on the aerobike. A great silence followed. . . .

Lily, at that very minute, anxious at not being sent for in her dressing-room, was going back to the stage, but she was stopped at the top of the stairs by the stage-manager, who said that he had received an order by telephone from Cologne, from Kellermann : Lily not to perform that night. . . .

" Let me pass," cried Lily, laughing in spite of everything. " That's enough of a joke. It's time for me to go on, I say ! Are you mad ? I tell you, it's my turn ! "

But she ceased, as though struck by thunder. The aerobike, with wings wide open, was taking flight towards the stars, in a tempestuous wind.

It was done ! The thing had shot past her very nose ! She thought that she would fall, so great was the pain at her heart :

" No ! No ! " she gasped, with dilated eyes.

And, suddenly, she understood and uttered a cry of rage.

But she could have shouted, " Murder ! " and it would have sounded as the buzzing of a bee amid that explosion of cheers. And the orchestra grew like a flame and the light appeared, increased and shone all over the house. . . .

Lily flung herself back, closed her eyes so as not to see, fled to her dressing-room, with a shriek like a wounded beast's. . . .

## V

SHE dropped into her chair, stopped up her ears ; but the cheers never ceased, kept on increasing, filled the theatre with a roar as of thunder ! Oh, it seemed to her that her chest was on fire, that they were pounding her heart ; that some one was taking her by the hair and banging her head against the walls ! And that storm of applause kept on and kept on . . . but it wasn't for her ! It was for Jimmy all the time : they had tried it with her, that was all ! To see if it worked ! And she, she, she who, only just now, was giving herself airs with the others : a poor rag, yes, that was all she was, less than anybody ; less than Tom, her old servant, less than Glass-Eye, that idiot, less than Ave Maria, less than a performing dog, less than anything, worse than anything, perhaps ! Mad with rage, she jumped at her golliwog, pulled down the white-eyed idol—the traitor !—spat on it, crushed it on the floor with her heel, furious, beside herself, and then dropped into her chair again, with her two arms flat on the table, her head between her arms, among the grease-paints, the powder, the overturned box of spangles, which rolled about everywhere and strewed the floor. She felt inclined to bite into her flesh to relieve herself, she clenched her fists and dug her nails into her skin. Oh, she would have liked to die, to die ! It was so fierce a longing, so desperate a cry that the force of her prayer ought to have struck her dead where she sat. And, suddenly, the tears began to flow and she cried and cried, all convulsed with

sobs, floored, shipwrecked, done for. She cried and cried, as though stupefied, saw nothing save through a thick veil of water, like a person drowning, sinking. It seemed to her as if the tears would groove her face, for always. Oh, what would she give to be at home, in bed! Never, never again would she have the strength to do a thing! She was done for, buried alive! And that coward of a Jimmy, to obey Kellermann's order! Oh, the harm he had done her! She would rather have died, smashed to a jelly on the stage: she would have suffered less! Oh, to behave like that: to flash so much before her eyes; and then to fling her to the ground! Oh, when she had thought that he loved her and that she loved him also, perhaps! And Lily cried and cried. . . .

Meanwhile, in front, the aerobike was receiving endless applause. The disappearance through the opening, the plunge into space, the star snatched from up above: that piece of theatrical symbolism filled the audience with enthusiasm. The aerobike brought down the house, its success surpassed all expectation; and the Astrarium was opening with a victorious clamour.

"Yes, but at what a cost!" said Jimmy to himself, in spite of the cheers.

And, as soon as he was able to escape, putting off for a few minutes his replies to the cards that poured in—the chairman of the Aero Club, journalists begging for interviews—Jimmy had but one idea, to console Lily for her disappointment of that evening: poor Lily!

His heart beat very loudly as he went to her dressing-room. Jimmy was no longer the fellow who knew no fear. To fly away on the aerobike, to risk his skin was easy, for him at least; but to face Lily . . . to explain to her . . . with all those things seething within him . . . and, oh, the pain he was causing her! How

could he approach her after that? And could he ever get her to love him? Ah, perhaps it would have been better if he had gone and broken his neck in the street, on the pavement! Jimmy was trembling like a child; in his perturbation, he even forgot to knock at the door . . . turned the knob . . . entered. . . .

Lily heard nothing, seemed crushed into her chair, with her face buried in her right arm folded on the table, while the left hung lifeless by her side. Her whole attitude expressed abject misery, profound despair; she seemed extinguished in a terrifying calmness.

Jimmy, to attract her attention, closed the door noisily. Lily stirred no more than a wax figure: one might have thought her dead.

He shivered; and, stepping forward, leaning over to her, anxiously, he placed his hand on her shoulder.

It was like a spring that is suddenly released! Lily threw up her sorrow-stricken face, down which the tears, mingling with the red paint, flowed like blood, looked at him for a few seconds with a wandering air and then leapt at him, as though she meant to bite him in the face; but her lips shrivelled up in silence, nothing came from them; and she crushed Jimmy with an unspeakable look of terror and contempt.

Jimmy did not flinch:

"You must not be angry with me," he said gently. "I was bound to do it, Lily; I had to save the theatre."

"And get rid of me!" cried Lily, wild-haired, hard-eyed, hoarse-throated, with the tears drying on her red-hot cheeks.

Jimmy was pale as death. Ah, all his dreams, too, were fading away!

"Lily," he said, in a voice which he strove to make firm but which trembled with emotion, "I have done my duty to everybody, yourself included! But for me, you would

be lying dead at this minute and the Astrarium would be ruined. You were not in a state to appear in public . . . this evening . . . believe me, Lily. The stage-manager himself . . .

Lily lowered her head under his calm gaze. . . .

"But you'll do it to-morrow," continued Jimmy, very quickly, "before Pa and Ma! To-morrow and the following days . . . and always! Your name will be right at the top of the bill! Do you hear? To-morrow . . . and always!"

"But what . . . ? Why . . . ?" asked Lily, as though stupefied.

"Poor Lily," he replied, gently raising that face all distorted with grief. "Poor little Lily! I have caused you a heap of pain."

Lily, for her sole answer, gave a convulsive sob; a tear leapt to her eyelids.

"Don't cry," whispered Jimmy, "don't cry any more. It will be your turn to-morrow, before the New Trickers. To-morrow! Every night!"

"Every night?" asked Lily, still incredulous and yet transfigured with hope. "You're saying that, Jimmy; but . . ."

"Do you doubt my word, Lily?" he replied, pressing her gently to him. "What, I, your best friend, your only friend . . . I who . . . haven't I always loved you, Lily? Do you think I've changed? I love you more than ever I did! I will explain everything later. And you doubt me, who would give my life for you: yes, life without you means nothing to me," continued Jimmy, in a stifled voice and clasping Lily in his arms.

Lily quivered in his embrace, hid her blushing features on his breast, where she heard great dull throbs. She trembled from head to foot. Her quickened senses seemed to take in everything now: the passing indisposition

from which she had suffered, without knowing it ; the light fumes of the champagne : all that had suddenly gone, was far away ; she had never felt more lucid ; she saw, she understood and was overcome with delight, overcome with a delight beside which her enthusiasm of the day before seemed dark and dreary. The ardour of her eighteen years swelled her breast. Success, in any case ! To-morrow ! And that man was hers, that heart was hers ! It was a dream, an enchantment ! Her head rolled back, a smile drew up her lips, her eyes, through her tangled curls, seemed all ablaze. Jimmy bent his glowing face over her. Lily, on the point of swooning, raised her lips to his.

Vanished around them the low ceiling, the scratched walls, the shabby rags. Standing on the poor spangles that strewed the dusty floor, Lily, drunk with joy . . . Jimmy, distraught with pride . . . seemed like youth and love, in mid-sky, among the stars. . .

## CURTAIN





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